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Egypt awakes: a nation-in-waiting no more

Dena Nicolai

CAIRO, Egypt – For 18 days the eyes of the world were riveted on Egypt, as a people who had been silenced for decades were finally heard by those in power, and an example was set for oppressed people throughout other Arab countries and around the world. Though the road ahead is long, as one Egyptian voiced minutes after the news of President Mubarak's resignation, "[I am] so thankful that today was peaceful. As the people rejoice we welcome tomorrow with hope and a willingness to work hand in hand for a better country for our children. It won't be easy, but we have claimed the responsibility and endeavour to live up to the challenge." After thirty years of dictatorship, Egyptians found their voice, telling their government, "We want change, we want freedom, we want our rights. And you must listen."

"Thank you for giving me the chance to taste dignity again," an elderly Egyptian told one youth.

The Revolution

A young Egyptian woman, Asmaa Mahfouz, expressed the mood of a nation when she posted a video on the internet on January 18 with an impassioned plea to Egyptians: "Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire to protest the humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation. [They are] hoping we can have a revolution like Tunisia; maybe we can have freedom, justice, honour and human dignity. . . . We want to go to Tahrir Square on January 25 . . . [to] demand our fundamental human rights . . . I will say "No to corruption" and "no to this regime!"

What is now being called the "January 25 Revolution," which drew people to the streets in unprecedented and completely unexpected numbers, continued after that first Tuesday (an ironic national holiday that is meant to honour the police – a feared and corrupted force in Egypt) and grew in strength. On January 28, the government cut off internet and cell phone service across the country in an effort to quell the organization of the protests. One security guard outside my church told the priest that morning, "Today is the day Mubarak leaves." However, many – including western embassy officials and foreign policy analysts – were still sceptical, given the Mubarak regime's history of effectively squelching political protest of any kind. Nonetheless, that day the number of demonstrators exploded after noon prayers in mosques across the city. The protesters were thrown back by the tear gas, water cannons, batons and rubber bullets of the riot police. But they continued on and large numbers of demonstrators massed in Tahrir (Liberation) Square in the heart of downtown Cairo.

We are the people

While the press covered Tahrir square, Egyptians across the country were coming together to deal with the fact that by January 29 the police had locked up and left, and thousands of prisoners had escaped or been released. Family men took whatever weapons they could find and set up roadblocks and checkpoints in neighbourhoods across Cairo. Defying the curfew, with stories of looters circling through the streets, they protected their homes, businesses, families and neighbours. The second night of the curfew, I was stuck in a train station with tanks parked outside, unable to leave because of the curfew. When I returned to my neighbourhood the next morning, my taxi went through checkpoint after checkpoint of these "Neighbourhood Watch" groups. At each checkpoint, all they could say was, "Please! Go through!", "I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry this is happening!" as if it was somehow their fault that their government had betrayed them. I talked to an American friend on the phone later that day, and the checkpoints had been the same in his area of the city. He said, "To see people

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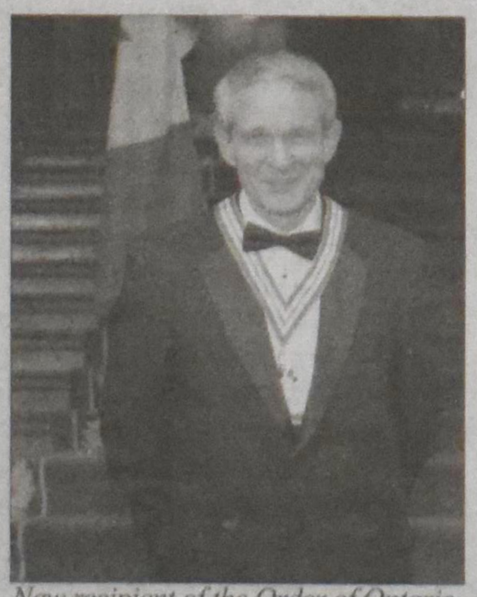
World Vision President receives civic honour



New recipient of the Order of Ontario.

Angela Reitsma Bick

TORONTO, Ont. – On January 27, World Vision Canada's President Dave Toycen was awarded the Order of Ontario in recognition of his work as a humanitarian leader. The Order is typically given to residents whose "lives have benefitted society." Like all candidates, Toycen was nominated by an anonymous member of the public. Past recipients of the Order of Ontario include Pinball Clemons, Gordon Lightfoot and Bob Rae. *Christian Courier* spoke to Toycen about receiving the Order of Ontario and his 14 years as President of World Vision Canada.

What does this award mean to you?

First of all, I'm humbled to be recognized in this way. I take it as much of a recognition of World Vision as of me.

Will it further World Vision's work?

It gives more credibility to my work and to the organization. To recognize a person who works for a Christian organization speaks to the fact that the wider society, which sometimes is not positive about Christian faith, realizes that we do good work; we are respected. I treasure that.

How did you first get involved with World Vision?

I was in my last year of seminary and [working] a summer job with one of my professors. He went off on sabbatical, but just before he left, World Vision called, looking for someone to do radio spots. This professor was very kind and said, "Dave doesn't know anything about radio, but he can write and he's pretty quick." So that was my

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News

Egypt *continued*

come together, to see them risking their safety for us and for everyone else in our neighbourhood: I will be forever inspired by their example."

The night before we left Cairo, my co-workers and I walked around our neighbourhood with a kettle of tea – the only way we could begin to say thank-you – and we must have served at least 70 cups. The mood was improved – the fear had lessened, and at some points it felt like a little block party, even four hours past curfew. The people asked, "We just want to know: why are you doing this? Why are you out here when you know the streets could be dangerous?" and all we could say was, "We're not afraid – because you're here."

The uprising continues

On February 1, one week after the first demonstrations, Mubarak announced that he would not run again in the fall Presidential elections. This meant little to protesters. While some of their initial demands had included confronting the problem of poverty, cancellation of the state of Emergency Law (which had been in place since 1981), the removal of the Minister of the Interior (who was in charge of the police), and a limitation on presidential terms to two successive terms, there were now widespread calls for Mubarak to step down. For those protesting – particularly the organizers – it was clear that Mubarak represented everything they were struggling against, and the only way to move forward was if he was gone. Other Egyptians began to lose faith in the protesters, feeling that Mubarak should be given a chance to keep his promises and the protesters should let things return to "normal" and let the economy (losing over $300 million per day) recover.

The next day witnessed some of the worst violence of the revolution, as pro-Mubarak supporters (accused of being paid off) stormed Tahrir on camels and horseback, armed with weapons. The army either could not or did not stop them, despite the fact that the day before they had been searching everyone going in to Tahrir to avoid weapons being brought into the square. This violence shocked Egyptians, and was one of the fatal mistakes on the part of the government. As one Egyptian friend wrote to me, "After the president's last speech, I was very sympathetic and could resonate with what he said, and started to think that maybe all the demonstrations in Tahrir should be stopped, but less than 24 hours later, we all saw the horrible images of thugs going in the middle of Tahrir square, killing demonstrators and throwing rocks from above, and I feel we're back to square one."

'We will not be silenced'

The days following the initial clashes between those for and against Mubarak witnessed more violence and more shallow speeches from the government. But it also saw a re-galvanization of the protesters. If the demonstrations started with the young, the educated and the middle class, by the time the momentum had built there were people from all stratus of society. They echoed a protester who shouted to cameras, "We will not be silenced: whether you are Christian, whether you are Muslim, whether you are atheist, you will demand your rights. We will never be silenced!" State media, which had tried to suppress the magnitude of what was happening, was failing, and on February 7, State Security released Wael Ghonim, one of the administrators of the Facebook groups that had played a role in organizing the first major protests. State Security had detained Ghonim for 12 days following January 25 and an interview he gave after his release brought another wave of energy to those on the streets.

On the evening of February 10, it was announced that Mubarak was to make a speech, and celebrations of his expected resignation spread throughout the country. However, when he finally appeared, he had little to say, and his condescension and patronization only further infuriated the crowds.

With 300 already dead, many feared what February 11 would bring. However, the people stood strong and persisted peacefully until finally, at 6 p.m., Vice President Omar Suleiman made a speech: "Citizens, during these very difficult circumstances that Egypt is going through, President Hosni Mubarak has decided to step down as the President of the republic and has entrusted the high council of the armed forces to carry out the running of the country."

'Muslim, Christian, we're all Egyptian'

Despite the violent scenes in Tahrir Square that have been played out again and again in the media, there were overwhelming stories of solidarity among the protesters. On February 6, a couple went ahead with the planned date of their wedding and were married in the middle of the square. Reuters interviewed husband Zafaan, 29, a psychologist, who explained: "These protesters are family now. We have lived, laughed and protested together in this square for the past weeks. Ola and I wanted to share our happiness with everyone."

That same day, Coptic Orthodox and Protestant Christians held prayers in the square. A Christian who attended wrote, "Today, our church went to Tahrir [Square] to pray in public for freedom . . . we were joined by thousands of people

Zafaan and his wife kept their Feb. 6 wedding date.

there. After this prayer [a prominent Muslim leader] went to one of our leaders in the church and gave him a hug and he told him: 'I am sorry for any offensive word I have written about Christians.'" Reports and photos from that day and many other days show protesters chanting together "one hand, one hand" (an expression of unity), and "Muslim, Christian, we are all Egyptian." Days earlier, during the height of the protests, when fear of the riot police (and later of the pro-Mubarak/pro-government "thugs") was strongest, Christians formed a human chain around Muslim protesters as they prayed, and Muslims did the same for Christians.

Christians encircle praying Muslims in Tahrir square Jan. 24.

The West

Throughout the uprising, much attention was focused on the West – America in particular – and what was being said by foreign governments. Egypt, the second largest recipient of American foreign aid after Israel, has long been an ally of the United States, and much criticism has been levelled at America regarding the blind eye it turned towards the Mubarak

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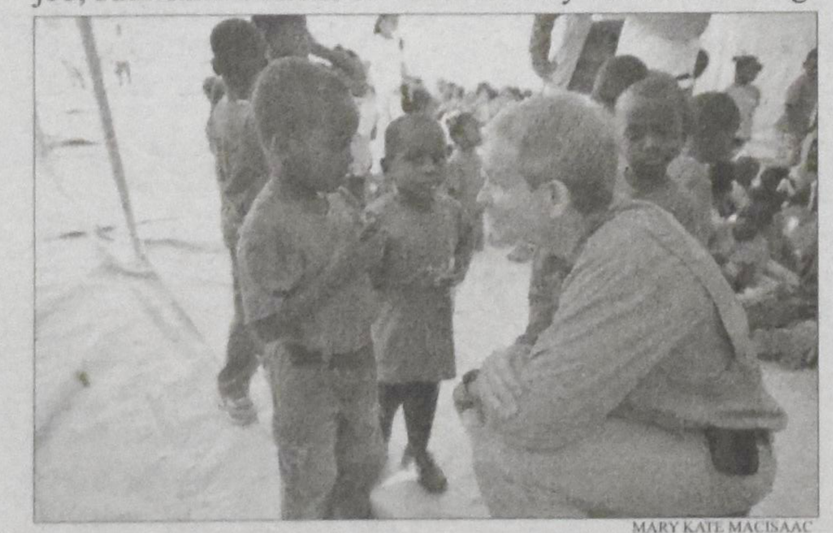
World Vision President *continued*

recommendation. That was 37 years ago. I went there for a job, but within a matter of weeks it really became a calling.



MARY KATE MACISAAC

Toycen's full attention is on children during a January visit to Haiti.

What do you love about your job?

I think there are two things. I'm always inspired when I have the privilege of visiting the children and families we're working with overseas. In spite of their difficult situations I'm always amazed at their perpetual hope. And secondly I just enjoy the engagement with our donors here in Canada: hearing their stories, why they're involved.

Can you describe your typical day?

If I'm in Canada, I'm doing some administrative work, meeting with people interested in our work, and taking occasional trips to Ottawa because we're increasing our efforts to influence government policy. I also meet with business people who are interested in being supporters, and I speak to religious groups and churches on a regular basis. If I'm overseas, the typical day is out visiting projects, talking with staff, or meeting sponsored children and their families.

In emergency situations I'm usually on-site, providing updates and documentation as well as counsel during the process of disaster relief.

How has international aid changed in the last ten years?

Some of the best practices around protecting children have really developed in the last number of years. In World Vision, for example, when people want to visit their sponsored child we require them to get a security check first.

Overall, the level of accountability that's required of organizations, especially the larger ones like World Vision, has increased. We have to be fully professional in every way in terms of how we do our work and the security of our staff. The language we use with our relief work is "Do no harm." With the best of intentions, we've gone out to help people in all sorts of situations, but if we don't conduct it right, it could lead to harm. How you set up displacement camps, for example, makes a difference – even where you put latrines. Are they set up so that women and young girls can't be attacked? We make sure they're well-lighted, so that predators of any kind can't operate with impunity. Many of these changes slow us down, but that's usually the price if you want to care more and in better ways for children and their families.

Tell us about one remarkable child you've met.

A girl named Teriano grew up in a Maasai village in Kenya. No girl in her village had ever gone to school because the belief was that girls belonged in the home. Teriano was very curious, very bright, and her mother picked up on this and took a stand, saying "Our daughter's going to school." Her mother was the oldest wife in a polygamous family. Teriano went to school; she did well but was still considered a bit of an oddity in the village.

She qualified for high school, and eventually did college work in Nairobi. World Vision hired her to do community development, and one of the first things she did when she had money was build her father a house. And that changed his whole attitude. He became a supporter of the idea that girls should be educated. And now all the girls in her village are in school. Today Teriano is in Canada working on her Master's degree in Social Work, and she plans to return to Kenya.

Egypt *continued*

regime's appalling human rights record and complete lack of transparency. Following January 25, President Obama tried to present a balanced viewpoint, never coming out strongly in favour of either party, calling for Mubarak to "make the right decision" and "respect the wishes of the Egyptian people."

By the time of Mubarak's resignation, some Egyptians were furious at what they perceived to be Obama's passivity. Others hailed his post-Mubarak speech as a celebration of what Egyptians had done, while still others were grateful that he had stayed out of things as much as possible. But as one young Egyptian put it, "Obama's speech only represents the end lines of a political message . . . [that] the U.S. supports whatever is in favour of Egyptian people, and needless to say that they ironically forgot that they've been massively supporting this oppressive regime for decades financially and politically." It is the hope of many Egyptians, and many Americans as well, that future funds directed towards Egypt will not support those who violate the human rights of their people.

From the beginning, the West had also voiced concern about conservative Islamists – the Muslim Brotherhood in particular – taking control in any power vacuum that might appear. However, the 18 days of the revolution revealed that, as one American professor living for 12 years in Cairo points out, "One of the big stories to emerge this past week is how little support the Muslim Brotherhood appears to have. They were like a bogeyman in the closet that the regime used to keep the international community and Egyptians in line. But when the lights were turned on, the threat turned out to not be so real. And Christians, who undoubtedly have been among the most afraid of what would happen if Mubarak left I think are also starting to see a different future: realizing that, as 10 percent of the population if they all voted, combined with the majority in the cities who want a secular democracy, more radical elements would be kept on the fringe. This is doubly true if Egyptians abroad vote. So we hope that a new era of participation and engagement across all levels of society develops."

Moving forward

Egypt is not naive about what lies ahead, and the current dialogue will be the building blocks of a new society. Though many are nervous about the military forming another regime that might mirror Mubarak's, so far the military leadership has taken steps to transition the government.

Practically, what still needs to happen is the lifting of the emergency law, release of political prisoners (including hundreds detained during the protests), establishment of an independent union federation, a provisional government and a provisional constitution.

On February 13, the army dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution. State TV announced that the military would set up a committee to draft a new one, before submitting it to a popular referendum. As most members of parliament were members of the regime that the protesters had vowed to overthrow, and the constitution was a product of that regime, this is good news.

A new Egypt

As the army and various councils discuss the political future, on the streets people are already beginning to work on their "new Egypt." On February 12, just hours after Mubarak's resignation, volunteers showed up in droves to clean up Tahrir, wearing signs with messages like, "yesterday I was a protester, today I am building a new Egypt." As BBC's Paul Danahar – who has covered numerous uprisings in numerous countries – put it, "This is the first revolution I've covered where the people cleaned up after themselves."

Petitions and pleas are being widely circulated as to ideas for this new Egypt. One young protester's note entitled "Long Live Egypt" included "ways to build our country diligently and without compromise" and listed things such as "Beware of sectarianism," "Do not bribe", and "Listen to and respect the opinions of others."

One day after Mubarak's resignation, an Op-Ed piece in Egyptian paper *Al Doustour* ("The Constitution") asked that anger not focus on the ex-President (a term Egyptians revel in using for the first time in history) as a person. It also cautioned citizens against excessive enthusiasm on one hand, and disproportionate fear on the other, and asked that they "support the revolution by respecting the opposite point of view," particularly in regards to those who had opposed the protests.

There are also widespread calls for religious affiliation to be removed from the Egyptian national ID card (which every citizen is required to carry). There have been petitions for this for many years, but they are now more freely and openly vocal than ever before.

There is also widespread acknowledgement that rebuilding must involve all Egyptians. One woman in the Delta wept to CNN reporters a few days before Mubarak resigned, "I am illiterate. I don't know whether the government should step down or not. All I know is that I have to feed my children, and prices are rising." The battle against poverty was ongoing long before January 25, and it continues full strength.

Like many Egyptians, Christians are nervous about what the coming months will bring and who will come to power. Many of them did not harbour the same feelings towards Mubarak as Muslim Egyptians, feeling that at the very least, he had given them stability. But still, there was agreement among many that it was time to take the risk of change. As one young Christian wrote shortly after Mubarak's resignation: "Thank you for keeping us in peace all these years. We deserve a better life not only outside Egypt but also inside. Let us say we will not allow corruption or terrifying people again. Let's start again with transparency and honesty. Goodbye President."

Over a quarter million people showed up Feb. 1.

Some protesters vow to remain in Tahrir Square until the army puts forth clear and transparent plans for a transition of power this fall. While the army has asked all demonstrators to return home, many Egyptians feel that as long as the economy can start on the road of recovery with the resumption of jobs and the opening of the stock market, and security is returned to the streets, the protesters are welcome to remain as a necessary reminder that the people are present and the people will continue to speak.

A year and a half ago, I wrote in *Christian Courier* that Egypt faced "poverty, an authoritarian government, foreign interference and a growing unemployment rate. It's a combination that encourages revolution, but it's not clear whether this country – accustomed to a pattern of fasting and feasting – will be able to break its fast from the status quo." An Al Jazeera documentary on Egypt once described it as a "nation in waiting." Now, as the world has seen, Egypt has awoken, a nation in waiting no more.

Dena Nicolai, originally from Edmonton, Alberta, lives and works in Cairo with a study-abroad program. Because of her work, she left Egypt halfway through the revolution, and has temporarily relocated to Jerusalem.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

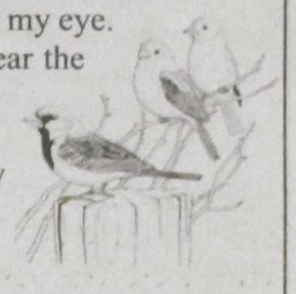
Here we are, Lord

My father sang out, "Wo bist du?" The notes sounded to me like this: ♫♪.

I first heard this a couple years ago. My father and I returned from somewhere in the car and Dad thought Mom might be in the basement. So he chanted his German question: "Where are you?"

This same question occurred to me recently while attending a meeting of a hymnal advisory committee. With about 70 others, I was located in the Calvin Theological Seminary chapel where we had been singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs all day.

Somewhere towards the close of the singing session – not too long after we sang a moving gospel version of "His Eye is on the Sparrow" – a flicker of motion attracted my eye. Up front, on the outside of the tall window near the right arm of the tall cross, a house sparrow was fluttering, trying – it seemed – to get in.



As the singing progressed the sparrow continued its fluttering. I soon saw what it was up to when a feather and then a piece of some straw drifted downward. There must have been a crack somewhere in the soffit and the sparrow was already – in January – stuffing it full in anticipation of a nesting season.

A house sparrow. Not my favourite bird. A European immigrant. A competitor, a dominator which replaces or severely limits our native bird species in competition for nesting space, for living space. (I've written about my war with these birds before.)

But I couldn't entirely avoid admiring the pluck, the energy of that sparrow. I asked one of the singers sitting near me if he had noticed the sparrow. "Oh, sparrow, what?" I told him briefly about the sparrow I had seen, and asked him if we perhaps should have been singing Psalm 84. I received that look ("What is this guy talking about?) "God's eye," I continued, "is on the sparrow." And gave my own look back.

It would be difficult to imagine a better space for worship than the Calvin Theological Seminary Chapel. Big windows. Airy interior. Carefully crafted liturgical banners or hangings. A good sound system, grand piano, beautiful organ.

I do wonder sometimes what we would answer if we were on Calvin's campus and God came to us during worship or walking around the beautiful outside and queried, "Wo bist du?" Would we say, "Ah, here we are, Lord, in forest clearing, with fox squirrels beneath the oaks and maples of that temperate deciduous forest you have made, wondering at the tenacity of that invasive sparrow? Here we are, Lord, in Western Michigan just a short way from a busy road that seemingly pays no attention to your world. Here we are, Lord, worshiping you in a chapel made of brick, stone, wood and glass. We are here, Lord, here in this particular place, time, and space. All praise to thee."

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) lives in Telkwa, B.C.

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Editorials

About pulpits and swords

Bert Witvoet

Our church has come up with a new "mission" statement (actually, we call it a "ministry" statement because we find that people tend to confuse the terms "vision" and "mission" when they adopt a mandate). The ministry statement that most of our members favour is the one that says, "In Christ, With Each Other, To the World." It's a good statement that suggests a proper focus on God, ourselves and the world. We were allowed to choose between it and another statement: "Embrace Christ, Encourage Discipleship, Engage Culture," but the latter did not carry the day. I think the word "culture" may have scared off a few people in our congregation.

Not everyone is used to the "culture" terminology. Some see the word as a way of describing different forms of art. To them "culture" is synonymous with "high culture." Others find the term too ambiguous or too impersonal. Maybe the majority of our members found the statement too complicated, not user-friendly enough. The slogan "In Christ, With Each Other, To the World" certainly flows easily from the tongue. But I miss in that statement a focus on discipleship and the fact that we need to address the culture we live in. So, yes, I was disappointed that our church did not choose as one of their goals to address the culture we live in. But I remind myself that our church is not my church. It belongs to Christ.

In his book *The Next Christians*, Gabe Lyons (author of *un-Christian)* talks about the Christian's responsibility to create culture in today's world, and in so doing he gives a helpful description of what a ministry statement could mean by the word "culture": "[Culture is] all around you: the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, the books you read, the car you drive, the organization you receive your paycheque from and the school your children attend. From shoes to barbecue chicken pizza to churches and civic organizations, each creation, or 'good,' represents a cultural artifact made by someone at some point in time. . . . The reality is that the cultural goods we use or encounter play a role in our every-day life experiences. They are seeping into our bloodstream whether we realize it or not. . ." (96).

The cultural mandate

Gabe Lyons goes on to point us to the positive task of creating the kind of culture that might earn the approval of God. The next Christians, according to him, "see in God's original job description for mankind that they have a role in partnering with God to fill the earth – *creating* culture that affirms his values of goodness, truth, and beauty. It shouldn't surprise us that being 'creators' is embedded in our original DNA. We are all made in the image of our Creator, and he has called us to exercise our dominion and stewardship by creating and cultivating culture on earth (Gn. 1-2). "Though sin corrupts our world, desires and motivations, we can continue to partner with God as cultural creators to restore his original intentions for our world" (97). The language Lyons uses should be familiar with Reformed people who cut their teeth on the concept of the "cultural mandate."

A few chapters further, Lyons writes: "If this Gospel – the Gospel of Jesus Christ – is going to reengage culture in a new way, it starts with us. And it will happen when we commit to demonstrating his restorative power everywhere we show up and to everyone we encounter: with our friends and family, in the neighbourhood where we live and in the places where our vocations take shape" (195).

I couldn't agree more. Churches and their members should bear a positive counter-cultural witness as they express their faith in a cosmically appointed Son of God. Our congregational prayers and our sermons should take wings and connect with what's happening in our society and in the world. I remember that when I was a boy growing up in a rather insignificant corner of the world called Friesland, preachers were expected to preach as if they were holding a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. I distinctly remember our pastor interrupting his sermon one time during the war, while allied bombers on their way to Germany could be heard flying overhead. He looked up and shouted, "There go the Tommies! God bless them." We were used to this pastor's impulsive ejaculations. We actually believed that the sword of the Spirit wielded in our backwater pulpit could defeat the communism in Russia and the rising National Socialism in neighbouring Germany.

You know what? It did … eventually … with the help of a few more pulpits throughout the world, wherever preachers engaged the culture around them.

P.S. Free to an ambitious church: a ministry statement, never used, looking for a good home.

Bert Witvoet lives in St.Catharines, Ont.

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Hope beyond uncertainty

May Drost

Last fall, in the wake of some sea changes in my life, on the front porch of my new home, I had a long discussion with a fellow night owl. In the shadows of nighttime, we talked about knowing God's will, and our envy of people who can speak with certainty and conviction about God's plan for their lives. Because it was dark, and late, both of us admitted that we did not often experience such certainty, and that made us feel sad and inadequate.

Personal inadequacies are hard to dwell on for any length of time, so we told ourselves that, in our personal uncertainty at least, we were in good spiritual company: Henri Nouwen, for example, and Mother Teresa. David of the Psalms came to mind, too. It made us feel better to align ourselves with saints and friends of God. But then my friend remarked that our feelings would not make a very solid basis for either faith or certainty, and we were right back where we had started the discussion – with our own feelings. Realizing that we had come to a dead end, we gave in to our fatigue and went inside to get some rest.

Balm for uncertainty

Some time later, to follow up on our discussion, I made it a point to read *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*. Her letters are a testimony that one can believe earnestly and passionately in the goodness of God and his redemptive power, and still be beset by uncertainty. One of Mother Teresa's letters to Bishop Picachy in Jamshedpur exemplifies this paradox. She writes: "You must have prayed very fervently for me – because it is now about a month that there is in my heart a deep union with the will of God. I accept not in my feelings – but with my will, the Will of God…. In my soul – I can't tell you – how dark it is, how painful, how terrible. My feelings are so treacherous…. I accept His Holy Will just as it comes to me" (p. 245).

King David similarly veers between rock-like certainty and his "why-are-you-ignoring-me" doubt. I remember an acquaintance from years ago who believed firmly in the atoning death of Jesus, but just as firmly that that atonement did not apply to her because of something she had done. I hope that she was finally able to overcome her doubt and accept Christ's offer of redemption.

Many parts of the Bible embrace our uncertainty, and offer a balm for it. In his book, *A Stay against Confusion*, Ron Hansen mentions that, although Jesus gave direct instructions to his followers, his favourite way of teaching was through parables. Hansen goes on to suggest that when we hear parables (stories) "our interpretation is never finished." This means that we can keep going back to the parables, and as our life circumstances change, constantly find new depths of meaning, or "surprise, revelation, and self-transcendence" as Hansen puts it (p. 21).

The poems and other narratives in the Bible also offer a kind of ambiguity that encourages us to realize we are never finished with God's Word, because there is always more to be discovered. Such ambiguity helps us to work through our own uncertainties by putting ourselves into the narrative. And if, like Job, we don't receive explicit answers to our questions, we *do* get to meet God. And that's not a bonus; that's the point!

Behind the text

If the whole Bible were written like the Ten Commandments or the lists of names in I Chronicles, there would be little incentive for us to keep going back to it. But the Bible is much more subtle; information is never just information. Consider one example: Just when we think we understand the Ten Commandments (they're pretty clear, aren't they?) we come upon the Sermon on the Mount; and, suddenly, what seemed cut, dried and clear, and calling for a specific response, becomes fuzzy, confusing even. Don't kill anybody. We get that part. But then Jesus complicates that simple rule by telling us, "Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." So now we can all feel guilty, even though we've killed no one.

What's more, we are instructed to "be reconciled" to the brother we can't stand. What does reconciliation look like? What if it's not our fault? What does it take to overcome the hateful feelings in our hearts? Once again, our uncertainty prods us to keep searching, to keep exploring ways to be more obedient. And suddenly we find that we can move, in spite of ourselves, from unbelief and uncertainty, not to answers necessarily, but to holiness (our Heidelberg Catechism's word for this process is "sanctification").

I have few answers, but God invites me to trade my questions in for trust. Like everyone else, I am waiting for daylight. I want to see clearly. All I am sure about is that my paltry uncertainties must someday give way to the one great Truth. Job said it first: "I know that my Redeemer lives . . . and in my flesh I shall see God; I myself will see him (Job 19:25-27). Time to come in off the porch!

May Drost (mdrost1@cogeco.ca) is a retired teacher who lives in Sarnia, Ontario.

Tidbits from our longest subscribers

It has been a joy and privilege to hear from faithful readers during *CC*'s longest-running subscription contest. Many of the stories we've heard are worth mentioning.

Since 1955-1960

Alice and Jerry Gerritsen have been married 51 years and "can't remember NOT having *CC* in our home." They usually read the paper from back to front, starting with ads and anniversaries. Bill and Margaret Colyn have subscribed for 55 years; Gerda Heinen, now 92, immigrated in 1956 and has been subscribing to *CC* ever since. Bill Braam is 94 years old and his *CC* subscription – 54 years – is topped only by how long he's played the organ – for 74 years! He still enjoys playing in Holland Christian Homes. Other subscribers who have read *CC* for over fifty years include Alice Kater, T. Kloosterman and Elizabeth Tavenier.

Since 1953-1954

Johanna Oosterhof can easily date the first *CC* she received to 1954 because it carried the birth announcement of her oldest son. As a joke, Hero Huitsing's sons used to call *CC* the *Communist Contact*. Huitsing has read the paper for 56 years and says, "We sure would miss *CC* if it wasn't there." He began as a draftsman in the Netherlands and still did drafts until last year.

Okke and Nita Bouwma, co-founders of Immanuel Christian School in Quebec, have subscribed since their wedding day in November, 1953. Gertie Wagenaar remembers sending in stories to Mrs. Rev. De Wit, editor of *CC*'s Vrouwen hoetkje ("Women's corner"), and later Gertie edited the column herself.

Since 1951-1952

Paul deKoekKoek, first editor of *Calvinist Contact*, was also a CRC Home Missionary in B.C. He preached in so many churches each Sunday that he was called "the flying pastor," Bill Luymes recalls. With DeKoekKoek's encouragement, the Luymes family subscribed in 1952.

That same year on the other side of the country, homesick Hilda Iedema replied to an ad in *CC* from Rev. Moes. Hilda's husband and sons left each Monday morning for lumber camp, and returned late on Saturdays. So she was thrilled with an ensuing visit from Rev. and Mrs. Moes to her Cape Breton home, as well as the addresses the Moes brought of nearby immigrants.

In 1950, Bert Schaly was the first organist hired by Barrie Christian Reformed Church, shortly before he started reading *CC*. His mother, now 100, bought him a pump organ when he was 18.

Elijah Bell, Alida Brinkman, Cornelius and Reina Feyen, Fred Gietema, John and Diane Grevers, P.I. Oosterhof, H. Roffel, Sid Ryzebol, Japke Vanderhoek-Reitsma and Dirk VerBeek have also subscribed since the early 1950s.

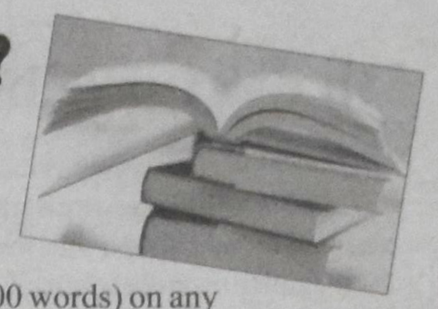
Before 1950

Five families have been reading various versions of *CC* for 61 years. In Manitoba, dairy farmer William Harbers started reading DeKoekkoek's *Canadian Calvinist* in 1949. After all this time, he still enjoys the paper enough to ask for extra copies to distribute at Christmas in Ontario. When the Ontario *Contact* began, Hank and Riek Postma began reading it right away. Harry DeJong, a founding member of Wellandport Christian Reformed Church, also subscribed in 1949. Fred and Dorothy Boonstra remember subscribing then too, the same year they bought a '29 Chevy for $195. Jim Aukema immigrated in 1949 and subscribed to Contact right away. He sums up *CC*'s history well: "The media loves to give us bad news to endure, but your paper explains the cause and the cure."

Although we initially planned to give five free subscriptions to the winner, we didn't expect a five-way tie! Consequently, the five sets of readers who subscribed in 1949 will each receive two free gift subscriptions to give to family or friends. Harbers, Postma, DeJong, Boonstra and Aukema can contact Rose (rose@christiancourier.ca or 905.682.8311 or 1.800.969.4838) with mailing addresses to get those started. Thank you to everyone who participated, and happy reading!

"I pray that many more do read and pay," as Mr. Aukema concludes, "so that your paper remains to the end of days." – Ed.

What's your story?



Announcing the second annual *Christian Courier* Short Story Contest!

I: Send in your original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by May 1, 2011. First prize receives $100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to *cathy@christiancourier.ca*. Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

II: Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. Send your short stories (500 - 1000 words) to *cathy@christiancourier.ca* before May 1, 2011. The two best submissions will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at $50 (first place) and $25 (second place). All stories will be considered for publication in *CC*.

Civilized loafing!

Spent all morning in glorious freedom doing nothing! Curt Gesch ("Spending time profitably," *CC* Jan. 24) would be proud. Slow wakeup, deep reverie while drifting in and out of slumber, percolating like a slow cooked stew, the secret to a good start to the day.

Sitting around in house coat, slippers, a coffee, the paper, hair unkempt, stubble on face, doing nothing in particular, looking at the bird feeder, reminiscing, day-dreaming. Civilized loafing! What a grand day this is! Amid all the depressing, sordid news in the morning paper, I read, "Look at each day with awe, as if you have never seen it before." True, have you ever seen today before?

Open my email to find a message from the "Slow Down Now" society apologizing that the attached newsletter arrives a mere 12 months since the last one, leaving too little time to read the previous newsletter. This issue suggests: "The ability to slow down may well demonstrate a higher level of psychological development. Doing nothing is paradoxically difficult."

Wow, what a great boost! Just what my Calvinist, guilt-ridden conscience needs.

Idly paging through *Waiting for the Weekend* by Witold Rybczynski brings this convention defying quote from G.K. Chesterton, "If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing badly." His comment about recreational activities, which Chesterton suggests should be more playful and less serious.

Waiting for the Weekend considers modern society crazy. We work longer and harder than any people before us, not to enjoy leisure but to consume products and experiences. Even our recreation is driven by a need to consume. Instead of providing glorious freedom, so-called "free time" is structured and demanding.

We need more civilized loafing (I love that term) but don't rush into it; do it slowly and after you finish doing nothing, take a rest!

Nick Loenen
Richmond, BC

Christian Courier

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News

5th century church uncovered in Israel

With files from Israel National News and NPR

JERUSALEM – Early this month Israeli archaeologists presented to the world a previously unknown 1,500-year-old Byzantine-style church which they uncovered in December 2010. In the Judean hills southwest of Jerusalem, the site is known as Hirbet Madras.

The church features an unusually well-preserved mosaic floor containing images of lions, foxes, fish and peacocks. The floor is "one of the most beautiful mosaics to be uncovered in Israel in recent years," according to dig leader Amir Ganor of the Israel Antiquities Authority. "It is unique in its craftsmanship and level of preservation."

Used for worship between the 5th and 7th centuries, the building also had eight marble columns imported from what is now Turkey.

The church was visible for barely a month before archaeologists covered it again with soil for its own protection. Ganor says the church will remain covered until funding is obtained to open it as a tourist site.

Under the church: Zechariah's tomb?

The Antiquities Authority discovered last fall that antiquities thieves had begun plundering the ruins, which sit on an uninhabited hill not far from an Israeli farming community.

An initial survey suggested the building was a synagogue, but the excavation revealed stones carved with crosses, identifying it as a church. The building had been built atop another Jewish structure some 500 years older, dating to Roman times.

Hewn into the rock underneath that earlier structure is a network of tunnels that archaeologists believe were used by Jewish rebels fighting Roman armies in the second century A.D.

Stone steps lead down from the floor of the church to a small burial cave, which scholars suggest may have been the burial place of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. Numerous artifacts were discovered in a subterranean hiding complex that featured rooms, water installations, store rooms and traps. Among the items found in the rooms were coins from the time of the Great Revolt (66-70 A.D.) and the Bar Kochba Revolt (132 - 135 A.D.), stone vessels, lamps and various Jewish pottery vessels from the period.

Hirbet Madras was known as the site of a large, important Jewish community from the Second Temple period. The city was destroyed during the Bar Kochba Revolt in A.D. 135.

Israel has an exceptionally high concentration of archaeological sites, including Crusader, Islamic, Byzantine, Roman, ancient Jewish and prehistoric ruins. The church and entire Hirbit Madras site has been included in Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's National Heritage Project.

Canadian Catholic bishops issue advice on chastity

OTTAWA (CCCB) – The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued a pastoral letter to young people on chastity. The bishops acknowledged that "living chastity is no easy business in the sex-saturated world of contemporary Western culture."

They went on, "It's impossible to walk through a shopping mall, turn on a computer or television, glance at an advertisement or browse through a bookstore without being bombarded by sexual imagery of every kind. Pornography has never been more widespread, reaching almost epidemic proportions. It denigrates authentic sexual expression and encourages masturbation, sexual intimacy outside of marriage and the separation of the life-giving and love-giving meaning of sexual relations."

The bishops then encouraged those who "commit a sin of impurity alone or with another person" to participate in Reconciliation, also known as penance – one of the Roman Catholic Church's seven sacraments.

Reconciliation first of all requires conversion, then confession of sin; after that, celebration is possible. It "communicates to us God's forgiveness and merciful love," wrote the bishops. "All we need to do is approach his throne of mercy with sincere sorrow in Confession and we are assured that all our sins are forgiven."

The letter upheld St. Augustine, Kateri Tekakwita, Pier Giorgio Frassati and St. Gianna Beretta Molla as "chaste lovers and holy role models."

Egyptian Christians fearful of future

CAIRO, Egypt (CatholicCulture) – For years Christians in Egypt have been increasingly living with discrimination and persecution. In the wake of the departure of dictator Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 11, those Christians, who make up 10 percent of the population, fear that the political change may not necessarily be change for the better.

"I don't believe Mubarak is a good man, but he's at least ten times better than the Muslim Brotherhood is," a popular tweeter named Maged told FoxNews.Com just before Mubarak stepped down. "Imagine if they took control with American approval."

Founded in 1929, the Muslim Brotherhood seeks the restoration of the caliphate (which ended with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire), the imposition of Sharia law and a union of Islamic nations. Under Mubarak the group was kept on a tight leash in Egypt. Blogger Maged described an ascendant Muslim Brotherhood as the "mother of all fears," a nightmare for Christians: "About 90 percent of the population here believes that slitting our throats is their way to heaven."

As protests gripped Tahrir Square in Cairo some Christian demonstrators were seen praying peacefully with Muslims. Coptic Christians formed a protective wall around Muslims, allowing them space for noonday prayers. Muslims in turn offered a salute to the Copts slain in Alexandria. The BBC reported that a new sign, joining the cross with the crescent, began to be increasingly common among the demonstrators.

However, the uprising led to new attacks on Egyptian Christians. A church in Rafah, near Egypt's border with Gaza, was hit with a firebomb, but the church was empty and no one was injured. Two days later not far from Cairo,

11 members of two Christian families were killed in a brutal attack in which four others were wounded. That attack, which was not widely reported in the mainstream media, apparently took place because of the lax security situation at the time.

Largest Christian community in Middle East

Egypt has the largest Christian community in the Mideast. But life was not been easy for Egyptian Christians under Mubarak. The new year began with a bombing at a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria that left 23 dead. Despite that, many Christians believe the situation will almost certainly be worse if the Muslim Brotherhood takes control of the country.

"The Muslim Brotherhood has a long-term commitment to establishing an Islamic state under Sharia rule in Egypt," Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute says. "The Copts and other Christians should be worried. They would be reduced to *dhimmi* status – denied the right to celebrate Christmas and weddings or otherwise publicly display their faith."

Shea continued, "Christians would be defined by the state to be a dangerous fifth column." She predicts there would be a mass exodus of Christians, similar to the one in Iraq. Given the size of the Christian population in Egypt, Shea noted, "This would be tantamount to the end of religious diversity and pluralism in the Middle East and would inevitably lead to a deepening of Islamic radicalization."

Muslim population will grow by 700 million in 20 years

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TCI) – In the next two decades the world's Muslim population will grow to 2.3 billion from 1.6 billion, according to a report published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. There were 1.1 billion Muslims in 1990.

Over the next two decades, the world's Muslim population is expected to increase to 26.5 percent of the world's population from 23.4 percent.

In Britain some 5,200 people convert to Islam each year. Perhaps surprisingly, 62 percent of those converts are women, according to a survey commissioned by Faith Matters.

The typical British convert became a Muslim at age 27 and, according to the survey, was not motivated to convert by marriage. Fifty-five percent of converts, however, were married to a born Muslim, and 12 percent were married to another convert.

The study found that the vast majority of women converts adopted the *hijab* (headscarf) upon conversion. Books were cited as the primary influence upon converts, followed by Muslim friends and the Internet.

News

The King's Chamber Choir will head to Germany this spring

Marian Van Til, *with files from TKU*

EDMONTON – The King's University College is sending its Chamber Choir on a 15-day tour of Germany this spring. The choir, conducted by Dr. Melanie Turgeon, will leave Edmonton on May 1. The tour will include concerts in Heidelberg, Schiffetstadt, Landshut, Oberursel, Nordhausen and Fürstenwalde.

The trip will be the first international tour for any King's Choir and came about at the urging of Philipp Popp, a short-term King's student whose home is in Germany. Popp came to The King's for one year to study organ, piano and conducting prior to returning to Germany to begin graduate studies.

Called "From Far and Wide," the tour takes its name from that phrase in the national anthem and alludes to the fact that choir will sing a program mostly by Canadian composers. There will be a noted emphasis on western Canadian composers such as Stephen Chatman, Allan Bevan, Sid Robinovitch, and King's professor emeritus, Dr. Jacobus Kloppers.

In order to cover the tour costs the choir is "doing some fundraising," says Turgeon, and they will "gladly accept donations in exchange for music." So if people who go to church or work in the Edmonton area "are looking for carolers of a group of singers, and/or instrumentalists to join you," she'll be happy to hear from you, she says.

Melanie Turgeon may be contacted at (melanie.turgeon@kingsu.ca) or telephone (780-465-3500, ext. 8028).

U. of T. earns high marks in 2011 'green' report card

TORONTO (Plumbline/UT) – This year the University of Toronto is number one when it comes to green campuses. U. of T. has received an A- on the 2011 College Sustainability Report Card, making it the leader of over 300 academic institutions surveyed in Canada and the U.S.

"I hope it will make students and faculty and other members of the U of T community more aware of the fantastic things the university has been doing in this area for a very long time," said vice-president of business affairs Cathy Riggall. "Too many people are not aware of our leadership in this area and are not aware that we have been a leader for so long."

The report, prepared by the Sustainable Endowments Institute based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, uses seven categories to evaluate how well an institution meets its own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. In administration, food and recycling, student involvement, endowment transparency and shareholder engagement, U. of T. achieved top marks. The remaining categories – climate change and energy, green building, transportation, and investment priorities – yielded Bs.

"There are a lot of really cool initiatives coming out of the university," said Gavin Nowlan, president of the Arts and Sciences Student Union. "And there are a number of campus groups that are really pushing for a more sustainable campus."

Specific programs that add to the University of Toronto's green image have come from both the administrative and student bodies. These include the Lug a Mug program, which saves students $0.25 at participating coffee shops on campus when they bring their own mug, trayless dining at New College, and post-consumer composting, which was introduced in cafeterias last winter. Last year's sustainability office piloted a project that encouraged paperless teaching. "Faculty members signed on to a pledge to reduce paper consumption in their offices," explained Nowlan. This fall, the eco-tray program was launched in an effort to replace disposable takeout containers with reusable ones.

Under the leadership of director Jaco Lokker, U. of T.'s food services increased their emphasis on sustainable food. Having been in partnership with Local Food Plus since 2006, the food services have striven to increase the amount of local, organic and vegetarian-fed products used on campus.

U. of Barcelona suspends Mass due to 'progressive' student group

BARCELONA, Spain (CNA) – Administrators from the University of Barcelona announced that it has suspended the university's weekly Wednesday Mass indefinitely due to ongoing protests by a group of students calling themselves "secular progressives."

The university stated that no more Masses would be celebrated "until the university can guarantee the security of students who wish to attend the liturgy."

At the beginning of November, shortly before Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Barcelona, a group of "secular progressive" students tried to boycott one of the university Masses, reported the Spanish newspaper ABC. Police then began providing security at the chapel.

On December 15, some 40 students interrupted Mass at the chapel. Fr. Mosen Lluis Ramos, one of the university chaplains said, "It is sad that these kinds of boycotts" are taking place because they "prevent people from freely expressing their beliefs, and this must not be allowed. What happens here on many Wednesdays has no justification," he told ABC.

Continued harassment

Officials have decided to build a direct entrance to the campus chapel as a security measure for Catholics who wish to attend Mass without being berated and assaulted by anti-Christian groups as the mass-goers approach on their way to the chapel.

In this traditionally Roman Catholic country, the university

has maintained an agreement with the Archdiocese of Barcelona since 1988, which ensures that an area on campus can be used for Catholic liturgies."Article 18 of the Law on Human Rights and our own Constitution guarantee this right for citizens," Fr. Ramos said.

In the wake of the decision to suspend Mass, the university now screens those who wish to enter the chapel. Catholics must identify themselves and ask permission from university administrators. Despite these measures, some professors say the protesters have not allowed them access to the chapel.

The anti-Catholic group on campus is made up of some 40 students and a handful of professors. "They have gotten the administration to do whatever they want so far. First they got the chapel closed and then they made it difficult to go there to pray. It's intolerable," said one professor who asked not to be named.

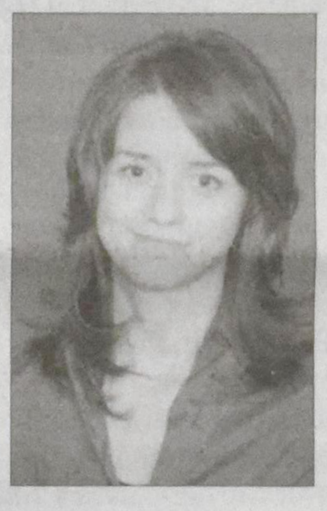
Evangelical Fellowship reminds Ontario school boards of religious rights

Marian Van Til, *with files from EFC*

MARKHAM, Ontario (EFC) – The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has sent an open letter to school boards across Ontario calling their attention to existing laws and policies that allow parents to withdraw their children from classes that are inconsistent with their beliefs.

Faye Sonier, legal counsel for the EFC, wrote the letter which urges school board members to ensure that the rights of religious parents and students are recognized and accommodated when Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy is implemented. That implementation, just begun, was what precipitated the EFC's concern.

In 2008, then Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne told a parent in a letter that the education strategy curriculum "is designed to reflect the diversity of Canada" and should be applied so that "that students can see the variety of their own backgrounds, interests, and experiences reflected in it."



Sonier told the school boards, "We hope this trans-lates into practices that are consistent with the freedoms of conscience and religion of all Canadian parents and children, and reflective of the rights set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)."

Prior right to choose

She noted, however, that the EFC is "concerned that aspects of the … strategy may not be consistent with these human rights instruments." She cites Article 26.3 of the UDHR, which requires that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind education that shall be given to their children."

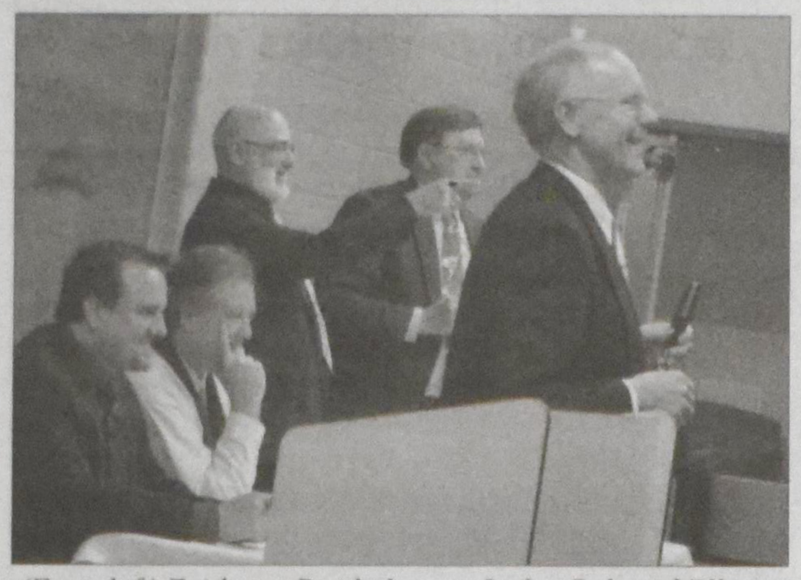
Sonier also noted that "the Supreme Court of Canada (in *Ross v. New Brunswick School District,* No. 15, 1997) has affirmed that school boards have a duty to ensure that the public education system is a welcoming and positive school environment for all students" and reminded school board members that "the court went on to require that school boards be 'ever vigilant' of anything that might interfere with that duty."

The EFC is especially concerned with "students whose worldviews and understandings may not be reflected in the materials being taught – that is, children from social conservative homes."

Sonier concluded by saying, "The practice that passes for compliance with these legal requirements is to grant parents the option to exempt their children from classes with which they find difficulty." She expressed the EFC's disappointment that "this is deemed an acceptable way to create an 'equal and inclusive' classroom environment." Nonetheless, we "anticipate that, as a minimum, this right of exemption will be respected as a matter of law," Sonier wrote.

News

Festschrift honours Professor Plantinga



(From left) Zuidema, Bartholomew, Leder, Bolt and Ellens respond to comments from the floor.

Michael Zwiep

A pioneer of Reformational thought and Christian postsecondary education in Canada, Dr. Theodore Plantinga (1947-2008) left few intellectual pursuits unexamined and few students uninspired. Known for his bold neckties and paisley humour, Plantinga's academic and personal legacy was celebrated and commemorated with a book launch and panel discussion on Friday, January 21.

A scholar of eccentric charm, a ferocious reader and doting curator of books and tropical fish, Plantinga was one of Redeemer's earliest employees. A loving father and husband, the native of Winnipeg, Manitoba not only plumbed the depths of philosophical meaning and human existence in the classroom but wrestled with the real life grief and mortality of the death of his first wife Mary and his own personal battle with cancer.

Dr. Leder, old roommate and long-time friend, provided a biographic sketch of the philosophy chair's life and legacy. Dr. Bolt, Theology Professor at Calvin College, documented Plantinga's tutorship under Calvin College Professor of Philosophy, H. Evan Runner, a direct heir to the neo-Calvinistic enterprise in the Netherlands and one of the most ardent champions of Reformational thought in North America. Bolt lauded Plantinga's vision for a Southern Ontario-based Christian college rooted in an explicitly Reformational worldview, as well as his colleague's love for the classroom.

Having reviewed Dr. Plantinga's collected writings and correspondence, editor of the tribute project and former student Dr. Zuidema focused on the philosophy chair's breadth of thought and academic endeavour. A noted expert on Western and Eastern philosophy, Christian apologetics, Dutch church and political history, sexuality and gender politics, no subject was taboo or unworthy of Dr. Plantinga's attention. Current chair of philosophy at Redeemer, Dr. Craig Bartholomew noted Plantinga's desire for the growth of the Reformational movement outside the walls of Reformed churches.

Today's outlook

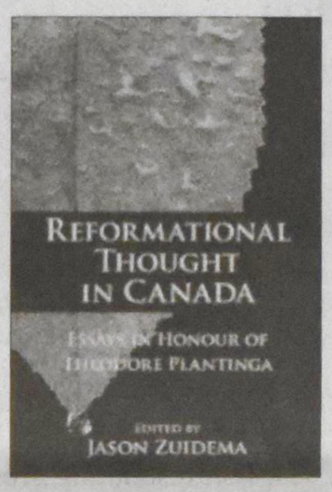
Following initial tributes by the panel members, the focus of the campus event turned to the state of the Reformational movement in Canada and the competing claims of orthodox and progressive elements within the movement, a preoccupying concern of Plantinga's. A central theme in the panel's historical summary was the relationship of the Reformational movement to the institutional church and historic Reformed confessions. In an effort to establish a pure philosophical system and a third way of thought and interpretation subject to the reign of Christ, Bolt conceded some of the North American heirs of Kuyper's and Dooyeweerd's brand of Calvinism had alienated potential allies in the pulpit and the pew.

Breaking from the ecclesiology, piety and classicism of traditional Calvinism, the leading lights of the Reformational movement rejected conventional religious, philosophical and political categories. The movement rejected the hierarchical authority of the institutional church and, at the same time, the comprehensive claims of humanistic secularism; the scholasticism of the Medieval age and, at the same time, the logical positivism of the modern era; the individualism of American conservatism and, at the same time, the collectivism of European socialism.

The movement's struggle for ideological purity, noted Bolt, at times led to a sectarian spirit inside and outside the walls of the Christian Reformed Church. While the Dutch fathers of the movement, including Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, subscribed to the Reformed confessions, later followers wanted the freedom to engage society and culture outside the boundaries of doctrinal statements. "The Reformational movement produced more philosophers than theologians," Dr. Bolt observed.

In his tenure at Redeemer, the philosophy chair repeatedly challenged students and colleagues alike to engage emerging worldviews and ideas inside and outside the walls of the church and classroom, confident that the core doctrines of Scripture and sound formulations of the neo-Calvinistic tradition were self-evident.

The evening concluded with a personal tribute to a number of members of the Plantinga family present, including the philosophy chair's second wife Janet Plantinga and brother Ed Plantinga.



Reformational Thought in Canada: Essays in Honour of Theodore Plantinga,

ed. by Jason Zuidema. (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2010) 205 pages.

Reviewed by **Greg Linnell**

The Theodore Plantinga that I knew as a philosophy student at Redeemer College in the late 1980s exhibited a contrarian curiosity alongside a deep Christian commitment. He sometimes tweaked the noses of the administration, called into question the pronouncements coming out of Grand Rapids, and advised me to seriously consider what authors opposed to Christianity were saying. He was also the friend who, when I was beset by doubt and anxiety, encouraged me to continue practising the disciplines of prayer and Sunday worship.

Thankfully, there is now a resource that not only celebrates and commemorates Ted but also provides a context for both his scholarly work and key developments in the history of Reformational thought in Canada. This anthology displays a diversity of topics, all more or less related to Ted's work and times, and features opinions both sympathetic and, at times, ambivalent to what he accomplished. As such, there is something for every reader and moving from chapter to chapter evokes, wonderfully in my opinion, the experience of many students at Redeemer who, in moving from professor to professor, profited from fascinating debates and differing opinions.

If you want to know how Ted's work and life took shape within the environment of Dutch Calvinist Reformational thought, I'd recommend first reading Jason Zuidema's "Theodyssey: Notes on the Christianity and Ideas of Theodore Plantinga," followed by John Bolt's "In Theo's Memory: A Narrative of H. Richard Niebuhr and the Transformation of Christian Education."

Zuidema recounts how, as an undergraduate, Ted became aware of the divergence within the Calvin College philosophy department between those enthusiastic about Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven and those faculty who did not share in that enthusiasm. It is also in Zuidema's essay that we begin to see the links between Ted's philosophical and theological commitments on the one hand and his interests in Christian education on the other.

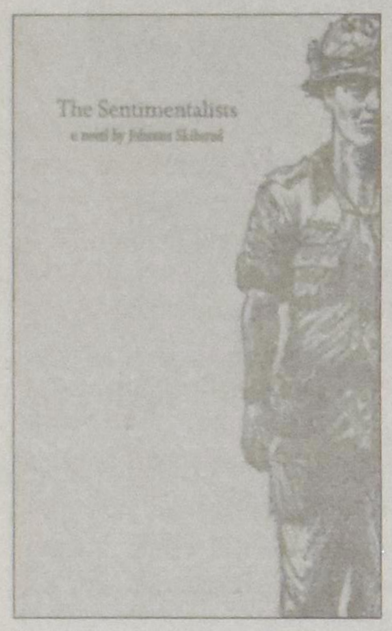
It is in Bolt's chapter, however, that what is all involved in Christian education comes to the foreground, taking pride of place with respect to Ted's other philosophical and theological concerns. The debate between those who desired to affiliate Redeemer with an established Ontario university is contrasted with those, like Ted, who promoted the independence of this new effort. Issues like these and others like accreditation and the pursuit of "academic excellence" became significant for what they revealed about more foundational commitments and the language used to promote those commitments. And these ruminations about the nature of Christian education cannot be relegated to the past: think of James K.A. Smith's recent reflections *Desiring the Kingdom,* in which worldview and education are tied much more closely to worship and discipleship or, negatively, the recent attempts by the Canadian Association of University Teachers to deny the legitimacy of faith-based academic scholarship at Redeemer.

The significance of the remaining essays becomes easier to discern against the background provided by Zuidema and Bolt. For example, the essay by Al Wolters and the preface by Craig Bartholomew reaffirm the Reformational educational program and utility of worldview language that Ted found to be problematic. A much more strident denunciation of the insularity of that program and poverty of that language is evident in Daniel Mullin's "Do Vegetarians Have Thinner Worldviews?" Turning to Ted's use of William James, Judaism and Jainism, Mullin suggests that what is needed is a turn to action, to practice, to the practical – a turn resisted by worldview thinking which privileges belief and conceptualization. The essay also serves as an introduction to Arie C. Leder's "Preaching Esther 'For Such A Time As This'" which similarly challenges the adequacy of a Reformational theological approach in favour of a model of interpretation more faithful to the character of this biblical text. Those adhering to what Wolters and Bartholomew convey about Reformational worldview thinking will find a response to the practical wisdom found in Leder and Mullin: James J. Rusthoven's "Suffering with Cancer: Reflections on its Full Meaning" explores what a Reformational worldview can contribute to ameliorating the practical struggles that come with pain and suffering.

This book will be of interest to those intrigued by not only Ted and Redeemer but also the task of Christian scholarship. When I heard of his death, I felt a stab of sadness in the recognition that the conversations I had enjoyed had come to an end. Thanks to the diligence of those involved in creating and contributing to this anthology, I have been able to hear his voice once again.

Reviews

Giller Prize winner deserves to be read, and then read again



The Sentimentalists by Johanna Skibsrud.
Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010.

Reviewed by **Brenda Visser**

Finding a copy of *The Sentimentalists*, the surprise Giller Prize winner of 2010, was a challenge until recently. This book was first published by Gaspereau Press, one of the few publishing houses in Canada that print and bind their books in-house, where much of the work is done by hand. Because Gaspereau could only produce several hundred copies a week, the demand far out-stripped the supply. *The Sentimentalists* is now being published elsewhere, and copies should be easier to come by.

With themes of relationships and loss, war and peace, *The Sentimentalists* is a thought-provoking, introspective book that a reader should take slowly or perhaps read a second time. Johanna Skibsrud has not written an easy-read, armchair novel, but one that requires the reader to wrestle along with her about the meaning of life and death.

The life of Napoleon Haskell, Vietnam War veteran, is narrated by his daughter who has come to visit him where he lives with the father of his fallen comrade. Set in the fictional town of Casablanca near the St. Lawrence River, much of the story takes place near true-life "lost villages" that were inundated with water during the building and damming of the St. Lawrence Seaway. By spending a lot of time with her father one summer late in his life, a daughter slowly learns of her father's past.

Broken into only four chapters, the story has an interesting organization that I have not seen before. Each chapter is broken down into smaller parts that are numbered, and then the numbered parts are also broken into smaller parts. It makes for slow going at the beginning, and demands of the reader to be alert and work at the puzzle, much as the narrator herself had to do with her own father's story. Given Skibsrud's background in poetry, it is not entirely surprising that the plot comes in bits and pieces to the reader, which creates its own tension. Sentence structure is often long, and at one point made me think of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in this regard.

Skibsrud challenges with metaphors.

Skibsrud's strength lies in her challenging metaphors. One recurring image is that of a boat that Napoleon had begun to build while his daughter was young. In later years, this boat that had never been completed but nevertheless always kept in storage was taken out and dusted off, a fitting metaphor for the war stories that are revealed by a broken Napoleon late in his life.

The narrator herself is often seen in a boat, pondering about the villages below the water, on what lies beneath the surface of ordinary life, on sadness and loneliness. She says, ". . . it had to do, instead, I think – that sadness – with those certain smells or shapes or colours that call up a certain moment, or a feeling, just a whiff of one, that you can't quite place" (p. 89).

She thinks about the past, and what has been lost, particularly in her father's life. War changed him, impacted her mother and sister and herself, and rippled through other relationships as well. How do we make sense of war? Skibsrud gives no clear answers, but right to the end leaves lingering questions for the reader to contemplate.

Incorporated into the novel is part of an actual transcript of a war crimes trial, which also gives the reader pause, and a personal touch. Skibsrud's own father experienced war in Vietnam and for the first time told his story to his daughter in his senior years. To read a bona-fide transcript adds a sobering effect to the novel.

Despite the sad, searching tone of the book, it is not without hope. Throughout, the narrator's relationship with her father is one of respect and compassion, despite his tendency to drink too much alcohol, to dislike her questions and to be full of very human inconsistencies. The reader can appreciate her father's faults without even realizing it – which is the gift of the writer. There is much poignancy as the narrator speaks of her father aging, and life's relationships:

"To think that despite our best intentions we may, in the end – and necessarily – leave the people we love quite extraordinarily alone" (p. 169).

The Sentimentalists has received mixed reviews from the general public, and so it may not be a book for everyone. However, it is a book I would read again – if only to see what I missed the first time around. It is a novel to consider and has potential to linger in the reader.

Brenda Visser, (brenda.visser@ripnet.com) mother of four and wife of one, lives and writes at **brendavisser.wordpress.com** *in Athens, Ont..*

Eastern-influenced worship continues to turn heads

Nameste Saté
by Aradhna.
AradhnaMusic, 2011.

Reviewed by
Nick Schuurman

Here's the scene.

You were invited to dine with some old friends at a local foreign restaurant. Menus in hand, you nervously scan your options, looking for the safest way out of a potentially uncomfortable dining experience. Two problems: you can hardly pronounce the names of the dishes, and you would still have no idea what each contained even if you could. And so you lean over to your friends, and ask, "What would you suggest?"

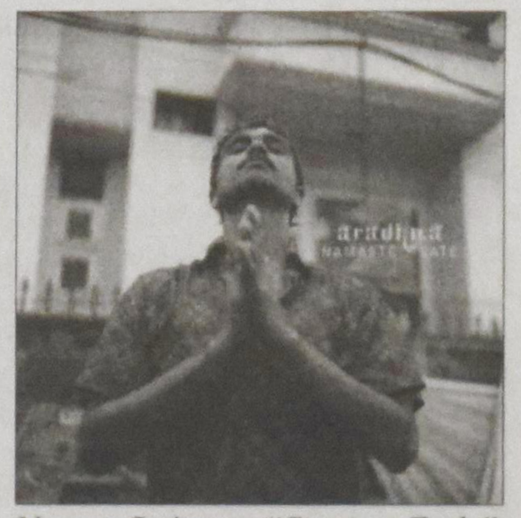
This is the musical equivalent of that sort of explanation regarding what is, in my opinion, one of the best options currently on the world music menu.

Few, if any of you reading this, I would imagine, are fluent in Hindi or Nepali. Let's start there. Aradhna, the name by which musicians Chris Hale and Pete Hicks perform and record, means "Worship," or "Adoration." *Nameste Saté*, the title of this, their sixth and most recent full length album, means "Greetings, Truth." Both Hale and Hicks, raised and born in India respectively, currently live in North America, but spend much time in India and on tour around the world.

Blending East and West in a powerful and distinctive sound, the band's repertoire of instruments includes acoustic and electric guitar, violin, tablas (a type of hand drum) and sitar. "What's a sitar?" you ask? Think Revolver-era, eastern-inspired instrumentation of The Beatles. Can you hear that resonating drone? Alright, now stop thinking about The Beatles; aside from that odd-looking instrument, a couple shaggy haircuts and beards, they've got little in common with the folks in Aradhna.

Sung in the elegant, soaring vocal style of South Asia, Aradhna performs Yeshu Bhajans – songs in the traditional devotional genre of India dedicated to Jesus. Lyrically, the recordings are a mixture of English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Sanskrit and Nepali. And in case you don't understand all of those, English translations of all the songs are included, along with beautiful artwork, in the album's accompanying booklet. Even translated, there is something moving about these words. Rich in imagery and laden with Scripture, they form a powerful and inspiring collection worth listening to.

Musically, this album takes a step in a new direction for the band. Production is somewhat stripped-down by comparison to some of their previous efforts, and it lacks cohesion. The album's strength, however, is that it swells. These songs build in a way that none of their past projects have, taking listeners from quiet and contemplative to a powerful crescendo and then back again.



Nameste Saté *means "Greetings, Truth."*

While I first heard of Aradhna from a friend with a particularly eclectic taste in music, every reference since has surprisingly been from men and women involved in ministry, both here in North America and abroad. For them, the creative projects of the songwriting duet that form the heart of this group are emblematic of a model for mission they endorse: learning the language and tradition of a particular culture in order to effectively communicate the universal truth of Christ. And while mission may or may not be the primary motivation, *Namaste Saté* is, without a doubt, a collection of songs created entirely in worship of Yeshu.

Aradhna has long been winning the hearts of folks who are weary of the over-worked world of Christian music where the terms "new" and "innovative" far too often translate to a slightly-altered facsimile of whatever the last band has been up to. They also represent a moving contribution to the creative worship arts that is reflective of the diversity and unique cultural traditions of a global church. There is a quiet and passionate reverence to these songs that is seldom found in the exhausted western genre of contemporary corporate worship music. To say that Aradhna is like nothing else out there is hardly an exaggeration.

Give Aradhna a try. Even if you're the kind of person who would never step foot in a foreign diner, who musically sticks to meat and potatoes, just try a little nibble. See if their soaring melodies don't set something sacred astir in your heart.

Namaste Saté can be purchased on iTunes or through Aradhna's website: aradhnamusic.com.

Nick (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is the Review Editor for CC.

Patchwork Words

Melissa Kuipers

The problem with singleness

In his renowned play *Our Town*, Thorton Wilder's wise and omniscient narrator observes before a community wedding, "People are meant to go through life two by two. 'Taint natural to be lonesome." While this is the norm for most people, there are those of us in the church who, due to choice or circumstances, simply will not spend our lives with one other person. It seems, however, that the Protestant world has absorbed the perspective of *Our Town*'s narrator, that people need to be "two by two," and isn't quite sure of what to do with those who haven't found someone to go through life with.

Why aren't you married?

In the movie *Mona Lisa Smile*, in which Julia Roberts portrays a "free-thinking" teacher at a conservative girls' school in the 50s, her students are never quite sure what to make of their attractive teacher's love life. At one point a bold student asks directly, "Why aren't you married yet?" "Well," her teacher responds calmly, "I assume I will be one day, but I'm not going to put my life on hold for it."

It seems society has come a long way in terms of the limited gender roles confronted in this film, so I find it funny that 50 plus years later, I was asked the same question by a class of interdenominational Christian high school students. And to be honest, I wasn't quite sure how to answer it, but found myself a little annoyed with the way the question was asked – not "Do you think you'll get married someday?" (a little nosy, but innocently curious), but "Why aren't you married yet?" (in a tone suggesting there's something wrong with someone past her mid-20's who isn't married).

This pressure to marry (and hurry up about it) is quite prevalent for young Christians. The whole "ring by spring" adage is one that goes around Christian universities quite frequently. While in university I had people joke with me several times that, as a female, I must be on a role to get my MRS degree, and my friends who attended Bible College observed the term has become interchangeable "Bridal College." Most of my Christian friends have married people they met during university or through connections made there and it makes sense – what a great place and time to meet people with similar interests and passions. But their experience, as well as those of us who have not yet married, is that life neither begins or ends with marriage – it changes, but we who are unmarried reap different benefits from our stage of life than those who are not.

Unfortunately, I've found that many people feel this isn't often emphasized in Protestant circles. A friend of mine in her 30s has confessed that, while she appreciates their intentions, she feels that friends and family push her to date as if she were "expiring meat about to go bad." Singleness is sometimes treated as something to be cured before it becomes terminal, or as a left-over "gift," a life full of cats and coping. Perhaps the problem with singleness in our circles is we have emphasized the Biblical institution established in Genesis 2, but have forgotten so many of the prominent roles unmarried Biblical figures play, whether as life-long celibates or widows. The problem with singleness is that it is perceived as a problem.

A place for singles

In their book *Singled Out*, Christine A. Colón and Bonnie E. Field discuss some of the issues surrounding the low percentage of singles attending church: "A 2008 poll on ChristianSinglesToday.com asked singles whether or not they had ever considered leaving the church because of the attitude toward singles. In response, thirty-eight-year-old Monica wrote, 'To me, the church has always seemed aimed at families. I've sometimes had to force myself to continue attending by not thinking of myself as a single person, but as just a person in need of connection with God and community. Sitting in church by myself, or being the only single person at a women's gathering isn't easy. But I continue to do so in hopes of making connections.'" As Colón and Field observe, "it is one thing for singles to leave the church because they disagree with its stance on premarital sex. It is another for singles who agree with the evangelical church's moral stance to leave because they don't feel welcome in a world that seems to cater primarily to families."

My Orthodox friend speculates that there is more of an accepted place for singleness in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions because of the role of monasticism in their congregations. The single is seen as playing a unique and essential role in the congregation, creating a relationship that is symbiotic with marriage and family life. While we do not have this institution in the Christian Reformed tradition, it is important we become intentional about reformulating our attitudes towards singleness from something to be cured or simply a waiting ground until family life, the highest of callings, occurs. Singles play a valuable and distinct role within church communities and their place needs to be recognized as such.

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From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

3.14159 . . . and 2.71828 . . .

These are two strange numbers – the first known by mathematicians as pi, the second as e. Both are described as irrational numbers, as they can never be expressed as the exact ratio of integers. That is, no matter how many digits you calculate beyond the decimal point, neither pi nor e exhibits a recurring pattern (unlike 1 / 3 = 0.333... or 9 / 11 = 0.818181...), and neither ever ends in zero (unlike 4 / 5 = 0.800...).

But both numbers have a real meaning. Pi is well known as the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter (3.14 = circumference/diameter). The number e is not as well known but is the base of natural logarithm and is interesting mathematically for a variety of other reasons (look it up in Wikipedia). Thanks to the power of modern computers, both have been calculated to many hundred thousand decimal places and, even then, no pattern surfaces among the individual digits; they appear random.

I have never understood why God made such a complicated creation around such simple aspects as the circumference of a circle and its diameter; could he not have made it a simple ratio of 3.0 (that is, circumference 3 with diameter 1)? Why should the relationship be so difficult to define, so irrational? Would not a simpler relationship have been possible?

Irreducible complexity

As we look at God's creation, both in the abstract world of mathematics and as science comes to understand God's world, we again and again see layer upon layer of complexity. Rules or phenomena initially thought to be simple and obvious reveal themselves, upon closer examination, to be gloriously but exceedingly complicated. In neuroscience, signalling molecules (neurotransmitters) sometimes start out as a huge peptide consisting of hundreds of amino acids which is broken then into multiple active pieces, one of which (ACTH) arouses the body while another (endorphin) reduces the pain that we experience. If we need to be aroused to defend ourselves because of danger, it is probably also useful not to feel pain. But it is fascinating that both these active peptides are found on the same larger precursor molecule.

To me it suggests that God has a sense of humour or a sense of play, as if God said, "Let's not make it straightforward; let's make it interesting." One way to think about good art, one of the higher acts of creation, is that it never fails to expand our horizon. No matter how many times we are exposed to it, something new is revealed. It appears to me that God is doing the same with his "art," his creation. It can be seen as a wonderfully rich toy that continuously gives delight. While there is a place for simple regular patterns, the picture is more attractive to us if the eye does not see a constant repeat of the same thing again and again.

Multidimensional glory

Thus we see biodiversity everywhere, a rich riot of plants and animals. Chemists looking at atoms and elements observe a diversity of physical properties and work with a periodic table that defies simple relationship. Physicists describe light as both a particle and a wave, even though these two characteristics are typically conceived as contradictory. The world could have been as simple as an alternating tile pattern with two tiles. It isn't, so if we believe that God is all powerful, we have to acknowledge that complexity, richness and playfulness were some of the Creator's deliberately chosen design principles.

When I turn from general revelation to God's special revelation, I see the same richness and complexity. God gave us not a creed or set of rules to apply in all situations but rather a book written by many different authors in diverse genres including histories, poetry, letters, parables and songs.

Seeing diversity in both creation and the Bible suggests to me that we should accept, enjoy and appreciate this God-given richness and not expect a simple – or single – way of looking at either general or special revelation. We could say then, perhaps, that our recent struggles with understanding the place of women in church leadership (grounded in multiple ways of looking at God's Word) is linked to the facts that light is both a particle and wave and that pi is not simply 3.00.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University and a member of Waterloo Christian Reformed Church.

Prinsburg couple cares for their three special needs children at home

Tom Cherveny

PRINSBURG, MN – Sandy and Chuck Leininger are parents to six children of their own, all of them grown. Their last child, Joshua, now 17, suffered oxygen deprivation and lives with cerebral palsy. He requires a wheelchair, needs daily medications to control seizures, and has a variety of other special needs. Yet there was no hesitation when just over three years ago the Prinsburg couple welcomed another special needs child to their family and home, Josiah, now age 4. No hesitation one year ago either, when shortly after the earthquake that devastated Haiti, they welcomed a second special needs child from that country, Chelda, now age 9.

The Leiningers have adopted Chelda (L) and Josiah. TOM CHERVENY

At ages 48 and 51, the Prinsburg couple know well the challenges they face as caregivers to three special needs children in their home. But they also know the rewards. Hence, the lack of hesitation in making two children from Haiti part of their lives.

"We enjoy it, we want to do it," said Chuck.

As Sandy explained it, the rewards can come in unexpected ways, like the time that Josiah's torrid fever finally dropped a bit. He started to giggle again, like his old self. Or as Chuck explained, the rewards come every morning when he wakes up Chelda and he sees what she will bring to another day. "She wakes up every morning with a smile," he said, adding: "She loves to laugh."

That the two Haitian orphans can be known for their infectious smiles and laughter are miracles of their own. Josiah was born with a condition that blocked the movement of fluid in his brain, causing his head to swell like a melon and causing a wide range of disabilities, including permanent loss of vision. He would have died, as his biological family in Haiti had no means to obtain the costly medical care he needed. They delivered him to the Children of the Promise orphanage in Haiti so that he might know some comfort in his final days. A volunteer nurse took up his cause and arranged to have a shunt placed in his head and save his life.

Jan and Bud Bonnema of Prinsburg helped found the orphanage, and brought Josiah to the U.S. for medical care with hopes of finding a family to adopt him. When the Leiningers learned that no one had come forward to adopt Josiah, they did.

Chelda's medical challenges are no less challenging than Josiah's, and her story every bit as compelling. She had been with two different families before Jan Bonnema and the Children of the Promise brought her into the Leiningers' life.

Community steps up

There were and still are plenty of challenges. The young children can suffer seizures, and there are times in the middle of the night when they just need someone to hold and comfort them. They need help with feeding, their diapers changed and someone to give them a regimen of medicines every day.

Chelda being lifted into the new van. TOM CHERVENY

A personal care attendant assists through the week and every other weekend, and the children attend school. That makes it possible for Chuck to maintain his full-time work with an area turkey farm, and Sandy her part-time job as a bank teller. Still, demands on their time only grow now that their own children have grown and moved on with their lives.

Two of their biological children and sons-in-law live nearby and lend their helping hands as they can, as does a daughter in college. And now, the Leiningers have found help is being offered from an entire community.

Though it came with a hefty price tag at $35,000, the Leiningers invested in a specially equipped van that is also large enough to safely accommodate three wheelchairs holding Josiah, Chelda and Joshua. They make frequent trips to the Gillette Medical Center in the Twin Cities with the three. And of course, there's just the need to get around to school and places in town.

The van has a wheelchair lift, something the Leiningers know will become increasingly important as the children grow and they age. The time is coming when they will no longer be able to lift the wheelchair-bound children on their own.

They consider the 2005 Dodge Sprinter an answer to their prayers. Others see it as the chance to turn their own prayers into action. Many in the Unity Christian Reformed Church in Prinsburg have long been humbled by the Leiningers' acts of self-sacrifice and love, according to Sarah Brouwer, chair of the church's Unity Missions Team.

"The least we can do as they care full time for these children is to help them cover the cost of their special-needs van," she said. The church's fundraising taco dinner and silent auction raised $12,000 for the Leininger family.

Used with permission from the West Central Tribune.

God: the Multiple Sclerosis specialist

Bethany Van Lingen

Dion Oxford kept asking, "'Do you think this the craziest thing we've ever done?'" wife Erinn says. In June of 2010, the couple and their daughter, Cate, were heading to Hospital Clinica Biblica, a Spanish-speaking hospital in Costa Rica, for a treatment not available in Canada.

"And I said, 'Yes, I think it is,'" says Erinn, the managing director at Parkdale Neighbourhood Church.

Dion has multiple sclerosis (MS). Two years ago, his symptoms began to worsen. The Oxford family, of Toronto, went to Costa Rica hoping for a cure. There, Dion would undergo a procedure for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency (CCSVI), in which narrowed veins draining the head are opened.

An Italian researcher, Dr. Paolo Zamboni, theorized that the narrowing of these veins leads to iron deposits. The immune system reacts to these deposits, causing the symptoms of MS. The trip and surgery, arranged by the medical tourism company Passport Medical, would cost a total of $16,000.

Dion, the founding director at the Salvation Army Gateway, sent out an email to his friends and family, including those at the Gateway and at the Church of the Resurrection, asking for donations. "In less than 48 hours, we had enough and I had to send an email asking them to stop sending me money," says Dion, 41. Dion has had MS for 13 years.

While on a tour of the East Coast with his band in 1997, Dion lost feeling in the right side of his body. In the next few months, the numbness traveled to his left side. After six months of waiting for a diagnosis, Dion sat his fiancée, Erinn, down to say, "'I have MS. At some point, I may eventually end up in a wheelchair.'"

Erinn felt sad, scared and overwhelmed, she says, but "there was never a question in my mind at the time that we wouldn't go ahead with getting married."

Since then, Dion has lost the feeling in his hands. He cannot walk for more than a kilometre or stand for more than ten minutes. "It's difficult for me to take my eight-year-old daughter to the zoo or to the Santa Claus parade. I can't go on long walks with my wife. And around the house, I'm not able to do a lot," says Dion.

In Costa Rica, Erinn, 35, and Cate nervously awaited the procedure. Cate had stomach aches from stress. "As soon as Dion was out of surgery, we were both happy because more than whether or not he was cured, we wanted him with us," Erinn says. Dion's surgery involved putting a scope through his vein to search for blockages. Doctors treated the blockages through balloon angioplasty, in which a balloon is inserted into the blocked vein.

Dion sought MS treatment in Costa Rica.

In the months since, Dion has found that his hands are still numb, but he has more energy and his balance is better.

"It's given Dion some more time at the stage that he's in and that's big when you're dealing with a degenerative disease like MS," says Erinn.

But the procedure is not a cure, says Jennifer Reimer, operations manager at Passport Medical.

Although he has not been cured, "Dion still continues to serve Christ. He has not given up," says Rob Szo, associate priest at the Church of the Resurrection.

"God is the MS specialist," says Dion. "I went into it thinking, 'If it so be that I'm healed, let the glory go to God.' I'm not healed, but I let all that happens go to God."

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Features

The snowbird effect

Heather Wright

What happens to the local church when seniors head south for the winter?

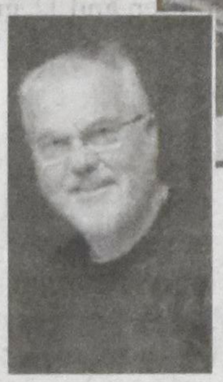
Every year, just after celebrating the dawning of a new year with family and friends, Wes Boelens and his wife Grace, pack up their car and leave the frigid temperatures of southern Ontario for the sunny south. Boelens, a retired contractor, has a trailer in Florida where the couple spends three months enjoying the warm weather before returning home to Wyoming, Ontario in the spring. They have been making the trip for the last 10 years.

It's a familiar story. All across Canada, seniors head to warmer climes, particularly Florida, to escape the snow and cold. Tourism officials in Florida estimate 1.87 million people from Canada visited the Sunshine State last year. *Travel Assist Magazine Online* estimates up to 600,000 of those people stay for 12 weeks and are commonly called Snowbirds. The Canadian community has become so large in Florida, there is even a 100,000 strong group – The Canadian Snowbird Association – which advocates for seniors on passport and medical issues and with local municipal governments.

Wes and Grace Boelens wave goodbye to the snowblower each January.

Empty pews

But beside the snow and cold, what do seniors leave behind when they migrate to the south? In their church communities, their absence is felt everywhere; from empty spaces in the pews on Sunday morning to service in leadership positions.



Above: Rev. Paul Droogers, pastor of Wyoming, Ontario CRC, at a church breakfast event.
Left: Rev. Jack Kerkhof

Rev. Jack Kerkhof is the pastor at First Christian Reformed Church in Chatham, Ontario. When Kerkhof went to Chatham to preach as part of the interview process in August, he looked out on a relatively full church sanctuary. But when he led his first service in January, it was an entirely different story. "I thought, 'Where did all the people go?'" Kerkhof says as he looked upon pews with empty spaces everywhere. There are about 75 families in First CRC; Kerkhof estimates as many as 20 senior couples head to Florida for the winter. Kerkhof had been in larger churches where seniors left for the winter, but the absence was never this noticeable. "If you have 75 families and if 20 or 25 of them leave, you have a big hole."

Rev. Paul Droogers also notices the holes when he preaches on Sundays at Wyoming Christian Reformed Church, the Boelens' home church. Droogers estimates up to 10 couples will be missing for lengthy periods of time. "I always notice it the most in the afternoon service because most of [the snowbirds] are faithful second service attendees and you notice the spots that are empty," he says. But seniors aren't just warming the benches, Droogers says. They are helping make others feel comfortable and when they're gone, others must step in. "Our volunteer base goes down," he says. "Those are the people who are usually active, whether they are greeters or serving coffee." The pastor says their absence is also felt by small groups, such as women's Bible studies. They still carry on, but without the experience and wisdom the older generation can bring to a group dynamic.

Leadership void

But perhaps the bigger problem is the void left in key leadership positions. At First CRC in Chatham, seniors who spend the winter in Florida still hold positions on church council. And that can create problems. "It played itself out in the first year I was in Chatham, when four of seven elders left for Florida for several months," says Kerkhof. The council, left without a quorum, simply didn't meet for a couple of months. "It was a peculiar feeling to me," says Kerkhof. "You do your work, you do your ministry and [the time] kind of slides by."

The flight of the snowbirds also affects how a church council is chosen in Wyoming. Pastor Droogers says traveling seniors rarely suggest names for council service since they are away during the nomination period. And they aren't readily available to serve themselves. "There is only one person who said, 'If my name is nominated, we won't go to Florida,'" says Droogers. Very often, the snowbirds' names aren't considered for nomination because they will be absent during those winter months. That's discouraging to Droogers. Travel south "takes priority over church life," he says. "Many of [the snowbirds] have spent years working for the church. We need them and their wisdom." He says having experienced church members serving with younger people on council would help bridge some of the generation gap which often leads to misunderstandings and disagreements in the church. And, says Droogers, those disagreements, once settled, can be stirred up again when the snowbirds return home. "The ministry keeps on going ...the ministry grows, the ministry moves," he says, adding that the snowbirds sometimes want to share their opinions when a decision has already been made in their absence.

But some leaders believe churches with active seniors may not have as big of a problem with snowbirds. Pastor Matt Ottaway of People's Church, a congregational church in Wyoming, Ontario, believes the more seniors are involved in leading church programs, the less likely they are to take long absences. "The people who are connected to the church, their hearts are in the ministry," says Ottaway. "They always make sure things are looked after before they leave and the programs run properly."

While pastors want experienced people in leadership in the church, some seniors, such as Boelens, may feel they aren't equipped to help in the ways they would like to. Boelens says while he felt old enough to step aside from some of the responsibilities of leadership, he was still asked to take on tasks, like the job of church treasurer. "But I don't have the qualifications for working on the computer," he says. Boelens is computer literate and still keeps in touch with the local church by reading the bulletin online, but isn't familiar with accounting software.

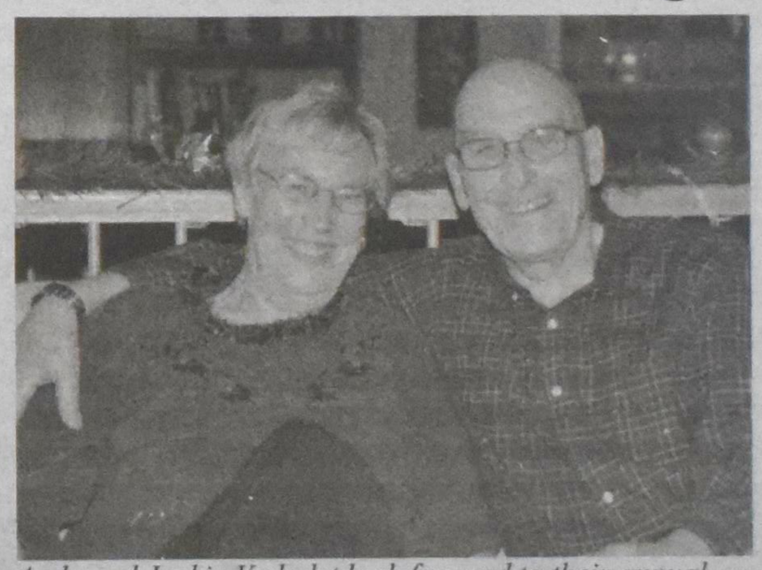
"I'm not being pushed out; I just can't do it."

And he says while the snowbirds aren't working in their home churches, they've formed their own church community in Florida. In the mobile home park where Boelens stays, there are a number of other couples from Wyoming. After attending the camp's morning church service, they and other members of the Christian Reformed Church and the United Reformed Church from Ontario get together to share coffee and fellowship. Sometimes, there are 30 people around the coffee pot. Boelens says in the afternoon, many of the seniors travel for about a half hour to attend church at Lake Alfred, an event he looks forward to each week.

And Pastor Jack Kerkhof says that while there are issues, churches with large numbers of snowbirds are learning to adapt to the situation. "There is still a significant number of the older generation here [in the winter]. There is still a lot of mentoring going on," he says. "And other people have stepped up to the plate. People on the cusp of being empty nesters, they're coming forward [to serve] so, I'm thankful for that."

Heather Wright is a reporter for Sarnia This Week. *She attends Dresden Ontario CRC.*

Volunteer snowbirding



Andy and Jackie Verhulst look forward to their annual trek south.

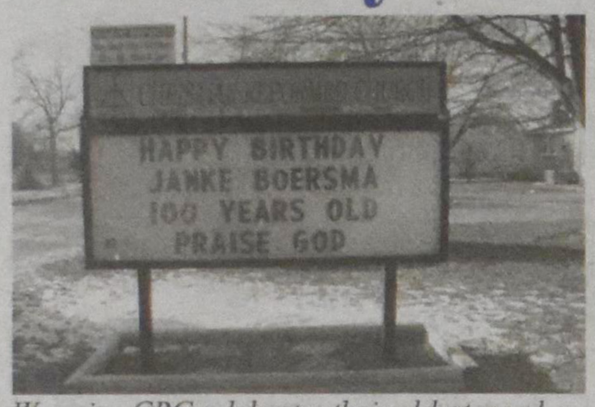
Bethany Van Lingen

For Andy and Jackie Verhulst traveling south used to mean more than escaping the Canadian cold. The retired couple has volunteered with Wycliffe Bible Translators for the past eight years while on winter hiatus in Florida. The couple from Cambridge, Ontario were kept busy while away. Andy, 76, worked in construction, while Jackie, 73, served in the cafeteria and did filing.

This will be the first year they are not working with Wycliffe. Medical issues have intervened. "There gets to be a point where it's not responsible. We don't want to be a burden to them, so we decided that we couldn't work there anymore," says Jackie, who suffers from back problems.

With Wycliffe, the Verhulsts found a non-denomina-

A century of life



Wyoming CRC celebrates their oldest member.

Emma Boersma

If Peter Pan offered to take you to a place where you would never grow old, would you accept? Many people would because our culture embraces youth. Growing old is to be feared. Aging does present both physical and mental challenges, but we are faced with challenges throughout our lives. I believe that the way we take on challenges in our youth can be a strong foundation for overcoming the challenges of later life.

At 24, I'm no expert at aging, obviously. But shaping my opinion is an event that occurred just over 100 years ago: the birth of a girl named Janke who would grow up to impact many lives. Janke is my grandmother, "Beppe," in Dutch.

Even as a child, Janke was an optimistic person. She loved school and learning. She helped her mother and developed skills like cross-stitching, crocheting, darning, and cooking. She wanted to become a teacher, but in rural Holland that dream was too difficult to pursue. In 1937, she married William Boersma. He took over the bakery from his father and the couple settled in Boornbergum.

Harry VanRuitenburg holds the hand of his grandmother, Janke Boersma.

William and Janke were blessed with five children, so Janke was a busy mother, but she helped in the bakery too. Their peace was shattered as Hitler's army occupied the country. Even though Friesland was not as deeply impacted as the rest of Holland, William and Janke experienced hardship, and participated in the war effort by occasionally hiding Dutch soldiers and Allied airmen. They endured.

Following the Liberation, William saw that Boornbergum could not support three bakeries. The family immigrated to Canada in 1958. Eventually, they bought a bakery in Wyoming, Ontario, and made a new life there. Those were busy, but happy, years. There was a strong Dutch presence in the community, making the transition less difficult than it might otherwise have been. Janke continued to manage the household and help in the bakery, packaging the goods and taking care of customers. She loved it when the neighbourhood children would stop by for cookies.

Janke was widowed in 1994. In her grief, she drew on her unshakable faith and the support of family and friends from church. She concentrated on the positive side of life. Her home remained a welcoming place, full of love and cookies for all who visited.

In 2009, Janke became ill and needed to be hospitalized. As she regained her strength, the family was faced with a very difficult decision: whether or not to place Beppe in long-term care. She valued her independence. She had lived in the same house in Wyoming for 50 years! But it was clear that she needed more care than she could get at home, so she moved to a nursing home.

Still optimistic

The transition was difficult. Beppe had to follow a different schedule and live with strangers. However, her strong optimistic personality came to the forefront again and she determinedly focused on the Lord's blessings in her life.

Our church family has helped Beppe adjust to the changes. There are many members of the congregation who visit regularly and bring the local news; she remains interested in the things that are happening to others. On the days when there are no visitors, she is disappointed.

Today, Janke is "Beppe" to 17 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. On December 11, 2010, she celebrated her 100th birthday. Her family and friends gathered around her in the nursing home to share how much she has touched their lives, to say that they love her, and to stand in awe at who she has been and become over the past century. Beppe just laughs and says she doesn't feel 100 at all. She enjoys reading, crocheting, and doing word search puzzles. She always thanks the Lord for his goodness to her and tries to lift up the spirits of those around her.

Strangely, I've heard most of Beppe's story from my father. Beppe does not often talk about the events she has lived through, but she has witnessed an incredible century: the clash and fall of empires, paradigm shifts, the rise of technology, and the lives of many generations.

Beppe became a teacher after all. My teacher. When I was young, she taught me how to play games. As I grew older, she taught me crocheting and cross-stitching. She taught me to learn from those who are older than I am, and to treat them with respect for the challenges they have overcome. Above all, Beppe has been a clear example of God's love. She taught me what it is to be a strong, caring, generous woman of God. She taught me how to grow old without fear.

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tional community of believers. Many of the volunteers were retired as well. "Everybody loved the Lord. We had beautiful family devotions together. We miss the volunteers," says Jackie. "We had a lot of fellowship there."

The couple were able to use skills from their previous jobs while volunteering. Andy was a welder at General Electric and also owned a lawn care business. Jackie was a nurse. The Verhulsts had bought an old trailer house to stay in while volunteering, but sold it after they stopped working with Wycliffe.

Without a place to live, the Verhulsts didn't know if they would be able to go to Florida this year. "But the Lord takes care of his own," says Jackie. "A couple asked us to come with them and we get along great." The two couples split the rent for a trailer in Barefoot Beach, Florida making the trip affordable.

Volunteering has always been a priority for the Verhulsts. They helped build a hospital in Mexico, volunteered with the CRWRC in Winnipeg and worked on a 50-acre property in Halifax for Wycliffe. Daughter Fran Vandermeulen, 44, says of her parents: "They always taught us to invest in people, rather than in things. They've done that their whole lives. People in need used to stay in our home. People on the outside of society – they would bring them in. It's how they are."

The Verhulsts paid their own travel costs and living expenses while volunteering, but they found the work brought benefits. "We wanted to work for the Lord. You can work and have fun at the same time. You feel good about yourself and it's good for the Lord," Jackie notes. Andy points out that you must be willing to commit your time to the work. "Also, you've got to be flexible enough to do what is needed," he says.

Although their trips to Florida took them away from their family for a month, Andy and Jackie found it easy to stay in touch through texting, cellphones and email. Vandermeulen, a teacher at Cambridge Christian School, was glad to see them using their retirement to serve others. "They're still contributing to things even though they're seniors. Retired Christians often want to give back when they have the time and energy to do so. It gives meaning to life at a time when it's easy to get a little depressed," she says.

Donn Hallman, public relations coordinator at Wycliffe Associates, the volunteer support branch of Wycliffe, also appreciates the contributions being made by retired Christians. "There is a great need for helpers out in the mission field. There are still over 2,000 languages without a Bible translated. If someone has retired and is looking for something to do, serving here can really relieve some of the burden off the missionaries," says Hallman, 48.

The volunteers stay at the Wycliffe headquarters in Orlando, Florida for a few months. They can bring a trailer along and stay in the RV park at Wycliffe for a monthly fee if they wish. Wycliffe generally sees 50 to 100 retired volunteers or "snowbirds" from about January to April. "It's a club of folks that hang out and do mission work – it's fun," Hallman, of Huntington Beach, California, adds.

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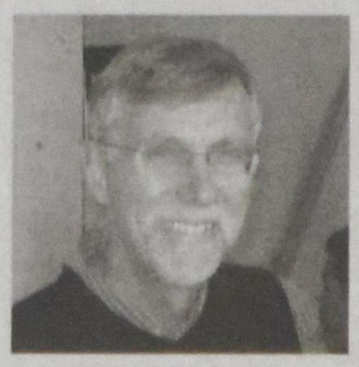
Features

blog: (n) short for weblog, a website containing an online journal with reflections, comments and links. *Christian Courier* gives you a glimpse into contemporary Christian perspectives by presenting excerpts from some of today's top blogs. Blogs are usually free-association, occasional, off-the-cuff and may not conform to the standards of print publications.



Tim Stafford is a freelance writer and Senior Writer for Christianity Today *magazine. He's written more than twenty books, both fiction and non-fiction. His most recent works are* Personal God: Can You Really Know the One Who Made the Universe *and* Shaking the System: What I Learned from the Great American Reform Movements. *Tim lives in Santa Rosa, California. He is married to Popie Stafford and they have three grown children. You can read Tim's blog at timstafford.wordpress.com.*

Whither Facebook?

I found "The Social Network" a very thought-provoking movie. Its interpretation of Facebook is quite negative, portraying founder Mark Zuckerberg as a socially inept dweeb with a ferocious juvenile longing for acceptance by the Harvard inner circle.

Whether or not this is an accurate portrayal of Zuckerberg, it is an intriguing explanation of Facebook's astonishing success. Essentially the movie says that Zuckerberg's longings were so crass and urgent, so undisguised, that he alone penetrated to the core of other people's crass longings and saw how to exploit them through the Internet. Facebook, according to this interpretation, works because it offers a sense of exclusivity and acceptance (you can only go where someone who "friends" you lets you go). It also provides you with information you can mine to make more friends and even partners. ("Relationship status" is portrayed in the movie as Zuckerberg's flash of insight that caps off his creation.) Thus Facebook is all about social striving, a desire to make it with the in crowd, have a lot of friends (and let other people know it), and get desirable partners. A dweeb like Zuckerberg can fulfill his longings without actually caring for anybody. Facebook enables a virtual life for those who find the real thing too hard.

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook.

Is that really what makes Facebook so successful? There may be something to the theory, but let me offer a more benign possibility. I think Facebook replaces two American institutions with a better, Internet-powered approach. One is the phone book. You can find people, and now institutions, on Facebook. (It is becoming both white pages and yellow pages.) At first it was fellow college students – and of course, college students most of all want to contact fellow college students. Now it is virtually everybody on the planet. If you want to reach somebody, you used to try the phone book. Now you use Facebook. It's not perfect but it's very helpful.

The second institution is the Christmas letter. Millions of Americans, myself included, depend on once-a-year letters, complete with photos, to bring the world up to date on their lives. It's not particularly personal, but it keeps you in touch, enables you to update addresses and phone numbers, gives a short summary of family news, and lets friends assess the state of your bald spot and your waistline. Christmas letters aren't too personal. You aren't required to respond to them; you don't even have to read them. Some you read, some you skim.

Facebook does that, and does it better: frequent, effortless updates, multiple photos. It's a better way to keep in touch. You can read what you want and skip the rest.

In neither of these institutions do I sense the ardent striving that "The Social Network" suggests. Of course, one must explain the hours some people spend on Facebook. I suggest that people spend those hours because they like gossip. Spending hours on Facebook is a time waster, but it is fueled by mindless curiosity and the desire to be in the know – not some craving for social acceptance and one-up-man-ship.

If my interpretation is correct, it means that Facebook will not transform the world. Phone books and Christmas letters are not revolutionary; neither is gossip. On the other hand, Facebook is not a great malignant cancer on society. Its future, this interpretation suggests, will be limited but secure. It will flourish as long as it fills these mundane functions better than the next new thing.

Making plans for elderly parents

Here's a tip for those who have elderly parents: hold your plans loosely.

You are going on a journey just as much as they are. It starts with a shock when you realize that mom or dad is no longer king of the world, but a person dependent on your and others' care. Learning to negotiate the world of caregivers and elder institutions and the medical system takes time and energy that you never dreamed you were going to have to give. It's not easy to figure out what's needed, let alone how to provide it. Coordinating your efforts with your siblings and other friends and relatives can be quite trying.

If you are lucky, though, you get it figured out. Mom or dad settles into a new routine, with wonderful caring people to help. And you breathe a sigh of relief. You can go back to doing whatever you were doing when you were interrupted.

But it won't last.

Looking back at my own father's slow decline from Alzheimer's, I remember multiple stops that were almost blissful. We were incredibly grateful when a Fijian man helped with dad's daily shower, and gave my mom a break. Then came the Catholic respite care, which Dad loved to attend. Then we found the care home where lovely Filipino helpers treated dad gently and patiently.

But each of these steps – and lots of other smaller ones along the way – reached an end. They were great – until they weren't.

When the system hiccups, you feel consternation. What is wrong with these people, this institution? We have to fix it! You think that, once having imposed equilibrium, you have a right to it.

Guess again. The norm has become change. Give thanks for the system that works, but be on the alert for its time of phasing out. The wonderful caregiver shows up late three mornings in a row because she has a grandchild in the hospital, and when you try to talk about it she quits. The assisted living home asks your parent to leave because he has fought with one of the other clients. Your mother falls and, after a stint in the hospital, must find new housing that provides skilled nursing care. Your father can't renew his drivers' license and suddenly cannot get groceries for himself. Your mother who has dedicated her life to nursing your father to the end is found on the floor of their apartment, exhausted and dehydrated.

What you learn is a lot like the lessons you learned raising toddlers. You respond to what's happening now. It's day by day, week by week, month by month. You don't project too much into the future. You are amazed and thankful for the way that God brings the right people and programs into your life, just when you are most hopeless and desperate. It will work out. How, you are never quite sure.

After you've been through this a time or two, you are amazed at how much denial there is in the world – and used to be in yours. Aging and death are utterly predictable. But when they show up at our door they surprise us every time, and we spend quite a bit of time and energy pretending they haven't come to stay.

Wrapping up work

Yesterday afternoon I spent several hours with my friend Tom, who is dying from Parkinson's disease. I had not seen him for a few days, and when I came into the room his appearance startled me. His body seemed to have shrunk to doll-size – he hasn't eaten significantly in days – and his face was a mask, like a paper cutout. He didn't communicate, though he seemed to make contact with us from eyes set deep in his head.

We entered the mystery of dying, into which the living can only peer from the outside. We held his hand, sang to him and talked to him. We watched him and wondered what went on in his mind. But he was labouring at breathing, to the exclusion of everything else.

It takes a lot of work to die. The hospice social worker said to me that it seemed like the counterpart of labour pains, hard, long travail leading to a new kind of life.

I remember my mother, two days before she passed away, coming out to join the family at lunch. From her face you could see it cost her every ounce of strength. Ordinarily so gentle, she looked stern and forbidding from the sheer force of concentration. Walking from her bedroom with agonizing slowness, she joined us. Her loved ones were there; a new grandchild had come to visit. She still owed a debt to the living. She always paid her debts, whatever it cost her.

My father died of Alzheimer's four months later, which meant that we had little real communication near the end. He had long since passed out of the realm of conscious contact. Earlier, though, I remember how he worked, as he sensed his mind disappearing.

He had a brilliant intellect, shooting like electricity from one interest to the next. All his adult life he devoured theology of a high intellectual order, but somewhere in mid-Alzheimer's he lost the ability to think that way. He could no longer follow an argument. For a man like my father it was a great loss, but not so great as I had expected. For a long period of time, a year at least, he became enamored of a series of very simple devotional books. They would not have interested him earlier, but now he poured everything he had into reading and rereading them. He went through entire books underlining every word.

His work went on, perhaps more than ever, as he felt his mental tools slipping away. He loved God. At that he kept working for as long as he could.

Features

From the 11th Province

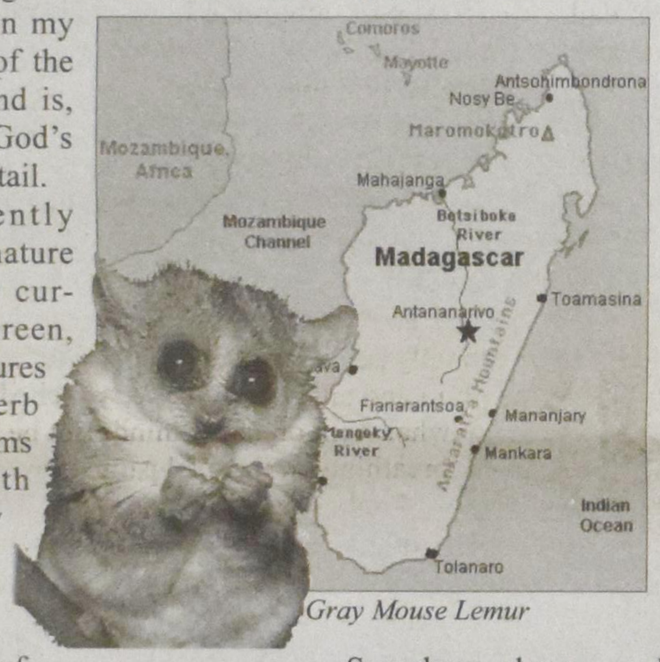
Marian Van Til

'Does the rain have a father'?

From the time I could talk my parents began teaching me the names of the flowers and trees in our yard, and to name the birds that flitted among them; to revel at the blinking fireflies on summer nights; to marvel at our sightings of snakes, snapping turtles, muskrats, woodchucks, chipmunks, possums, et al, on the nearby railroad property. My outdoor education also had me helping my dad plant our huge vegetable garden every spring – and selling red-wagons-full in the neighborhood when the time was right.

All of that instilled in me a profound love of nature. But "she" was never Mother Nature. My learning to treasure the world around us rested on my early assimilation of the fact that it was, and is, God's world and God's doing, to the last detail.

I now frequently watch television nature programs. In our current era of big-screen, high-definition pictures coupled with superb sound, such programs are feasts for both eyes and ears as they transport viewers to the very ends of the earth. They reveal the stunning variety of God's creatures and the just-so way that he has made them and given them qualities precisely right for the particular environments in which he placed them.



Gray Mouse Lemur

Except that those program don't do that. I mean, they never acknowledge that God had, or has, anything to do with the existence and sustenance of those millions of creatures and their habitats. Virtually all of the scientists involved, and the people who film their discoveries and write the program scripts, are firmly committed to their faith in evolution and to their complementary faith in atheism. I can't recall even one program out of many dozens that was not clearly committed to such a worldview. My husband and I got the BBC Planet Earth series for Christmas. The photography is spectacular. But the commentary time and again illustrates that atheistic worldview.

The bad science, illogic and human arrogance in such programs frustrates me to no end, and finally makes me turn some of them off. I did that again last night to a Mutant Planet episode which explained in iron-clad, doctrinaire terms the evolution of plant and animal life on Madagascar. The fact that this program airs on the Science Channel shouldn't fool anybody into thinking that it deals with empirical science, or that it is open-minded. Every species' characteristic, life-sustaining behaviour and all habitat suitability are stated dogmatically as evolutionary adaptations.

'Where were you...'?

That makes no logical sense, yet the documentary makers would scoff at the idea that God, in his glorious wisdom, devised every one of his creatures so that each is wholly suited to where he places them and what he provides for them to eat. Never mind that the scientists talk as if Evolution itself is some god-like entity that "knows" what is needed for survival and so bestows the appropriate characteristics.

Madagascar has many kinds of lemurs, all nocturnal. The mouse lemur can't survive the six-month dry spells, so it gorges itself, builds up fat reserves then hibernates in its tree-trunk nest for those six months. Voila! It wakes up healthy when the drought has passed. Having the wisdom and wherewithal to do that was somehow sparked by a random evolutionary survival urge, we're told. The many other types of lemurs, meanwhile, each eat a different menu of the available plants so that they can live side by side, well-fed. Somehow, chance evolutionary adaptation also worked out that nifty, fair-minded plan.

The Bible sees "nature" in starkly different terms. I love Psalm 104's detailed description of God's creating and sustaining of many species on land and sea. And there's the thunderous passage at the end of Job where the LORD poses pointed questions for any of us mere humans who presume to give him counsel, who take pride in our own wisdom and who think we can dismiss him as Creator and Sustainer:

"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? . . . Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand . . . Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food? . . . Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom . . . ? Can you make a pet of leviathan like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?" (from Job 38-40).

To which the correct, remorseful confession can only be: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand" (Job 42:3).

(The title of this column comes from Job 38:28.)

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.

Artful Eye

This photo was taken in Sarnia by Heather Wright.

Studying physics with my daughter

For years now I have heard the cracking of my memory,
reluctantly falling apart like an ancient building.
At first a little cement dust,
then portions of the wall – The Natural Resources
Of Brazil, the Shape Of Utah – nothing,
in the beginning, that left me structurally unsound,

but it grew to a steady pouring – Co-efficients,
Participles, and Tammany Hall – lying in
the chilly basement of my mind mixed up together.

This went on for years, no matter how much
I paid bricklayers an hour, the slow habits of love
like shadows sliding across the yard each day,
and putting children to bed every night
like the relentless caress of wind on the foundation.
They wore me down to vague certainties.

That's why, when Molly came in her blue flannel shirt and baggy jeans,
holding her physics book, I was surprised.
I hardly recognized my child
rolling up her sleeves in the sharp daylight,
hauling enormous words into the sun
slapping them together with new mortar
so fast I could barely get the idea. Do you know,
she asks, why water climbs a paper napkin?

She says water and the napkin both have Partial Charges.
She says the word Cohesion and the word Adhesion.
Her words fall into the rubble in my poor memory.
I tell her I used to believe in physics.

But experience has taught me what makes water climb the paper napkin.
The water loves the napkin and longs for it.

She turns her brilliant eyes on me.
She is the only person who can save me.
She goes to work, digging in the rubble.

Jeanne Murray Walker is a professor at the University of Delaware and past Poetry Editor of Christianity and Literature. *This poem was originally published in* Coming Into History *(Cleveland State Poetry Center). It is reprinted here with permission. You can read more about this prolific poet on her website: jeannemurraywalker.com*

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Signs and miracles

Tim Stafford's blog is one of my favourites. *Have you ever seen a miracle?* focuses on the muddled thinking about miracles in the media and even among Christians. He resists defining miracles too rigidly, but adds: "[yet] ambiguity has its problems. Perhaps the most basic: we get fuzzy thinking about God. He's everywhere and he's nowhere. He does miracles every day, which means that what he does is nothing special. We hardly see the difference between God's revelatory acts (his incarnation and atonement, for instance) and the little encouraging details of life. He miraculously finds us parking places. He helps us through a difficult crisis at work. For the fuzzy thinker, these become more prominent than salvation history. And God becomes fuzzy."

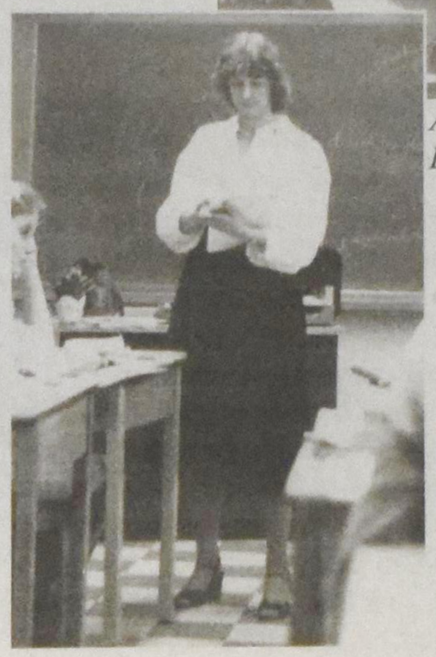
I share Stafford's dislike for sacralising the trivial. I don't want a fuzzy God. Still, the Heidelberg Catechism proclaims his "almighty and ever present power." The reformed view of providence grants us the confidence to trust in a sovereign God who hears our prayers and is able to answer those prayers in surprising ways. When we observe God working in our lives, we aren't being fuzzy if we say so. We're being prophetic. Our testimonies are altars of faith, marking significant moments of deliverance by a contemporary God who is still on the job. As "living stones" commanded to make disciples of all nations, we're called to highlight God's wondrous works, even in our own faulty lives. But, with a nod to Stafford's caution, we should do so humbly, tentatively. We testify within a circumference ringed by the communion of the saints and an admission of mutual fallibility. No arrogance allowed.

I have more than a few prayer stories that I find miraculous. Here's one.

Things unseen

When my twin brothers graduated from Grade 8, my parents wanted to send them to Lambton Christian High. However, because they lived on a farm far away, no bussing was available. Nor was it feasible for my mom to drive them to Sarnia every day. Various solutions were proposed; nothing fell into place. Finally, with an earnest prayer that somehow the Lord would intervene, my parents just registered them anyway.

Meanwhile, although my parents were unaware of this, the Board decided that should enrolment increase beyond 30 students in Grade 9, they would hire another teacher. The late registration of my brothers brought enrolment to 32. It was the end of June. Most teacher education grads from Christian colleges had already been hired. The Board was going to have a hard time finding the right candidate for the position, particularly because Latin was listed as one of the subjects to be taught.



Above: Lambton Christian High School. Left: Cathy, rookie teacher

I had just graduated from Althouse Teachers' College. When my mom read the LCHS ad in *The Calvinist Contact,* she urged me to apply. I had indeed studied Latin in university, a preferred option over math! I vacillated. I wasn't a Christian college grad. And, although I was stumbling back toward the faith, I'd gone through a rather public period of disenchantment with the church. I didn't think the Board would consider me. I applied reluctantly.

Maybe you can tell where this story is going: I was hired. Mark and I then bought a home in Wyoming, the midway point between the farm and the school. That September, my mom drove my brothers to my house every day and I drove them to school the rest of the way. The only drawback, in my brothers' estimation, was that their sister had to teach them Grade 9 history!

Lambton Christian High School was a spiritually enriching place for my brothers and for me, the rookie teacher. The meshing of so many unrelated factors – a set of twins, parents stepping forward in faith, a teacher without a job in June who could teach Latin, of all things, – created an answer to prayer. It was a providential synchronicity that led to many future blessings.

"Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me," says David in Psalm 86:17. To me, this true story is a sign, a stone pillar representing God's palpable intervention in a family's history for good. Not everyone will believe that. As the old saying goes, for those who don't believe, no proof is possible. For those who do believe, no proof is necessary. It may even be a miracle.

Cathy Smith (cathysmith001@hotmail.com) is a contributing editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Getting Unstuck

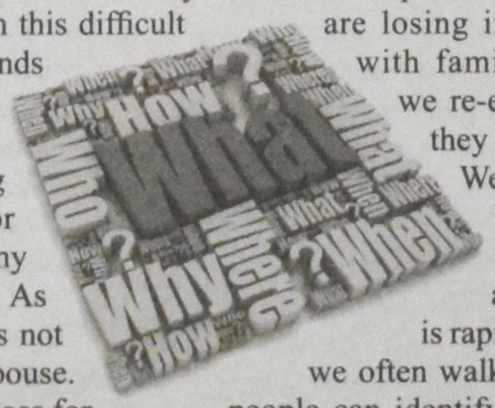
Arlene Van Hove

Doubt and other sorrows of the heart

For all of us there comes a time in our lives when the faith of our fathers and mothers needs to become our own. This journey can be calm and smooth or fraught with anger, pain and heartache.

Q. I am 52, married, mother of three children who have all flown the coop to begin families of their own, and a librarian as well as a volunteer for our church. Something totally unexpected happened to me. Over the last years I have been reading about world religions as well as how Christianity developed over time. My interest in other religions has come through having neighbors who are Sikh, Hindu and Buddhists. We also have an annual barbecue in our cul-de-sac in the summer and I have gotten to know my neighbors as regular folk. Ironically, I am finding a lot of good things in their religions and have lost the certainty that Christianity can be all things to all people. In other words, I am re-evaluating my faith in the God of my youth or in the picture parents, teachers and pastors have painted of God during my growing up years.

This chain of events has led me into various discussions with my spouse. My questioning of God does not sit well with him. But equally troubling is my incredible sense of loss and sorrow I feel as I try to navigate my way through this difficult journey. In addition, my friends do not want to talk about my "crisis of faith," as they call it. Presently, I am thinking of not attending church for a while in order to soothe my confused and restless mind. As you can imagine this also is not going over well with my spouse. And so, I am at a complete loss for how to go forward in a way that honours my marriage but also who I am as a person.



A. It is helpful to remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith. It is part of faith. Scripture is full of laments and questions about how God seems to run the world. So you are in good company. At the same time, evaluating our faith can catapult us into a tumultuous pot of anger, sorrow and heartache because the rug seems to have pulled from under us.

Sometimes, we are angry with our parents because we believe they lied to us about God. We experience sorrow because we are losing important connections with family and friends when we re-evaluate or reject what they so fervently hold dear. We experience heartache because the picture we had of God, ourselves and the world at large is rapidly fading. In addition, we often walk this path alone. Most people can identify with physical illness but we are not comfortable with sorrows of the heart and leave those who are hurting to their own devices.

In a nutshell, our spiritual life is about getting to know God and ourselves better and you are well on your way. And re-evaluating our faith can cause a crisis in our relationships but it also helps us become who we really are. It is an awakening of what life is really about.

I suggest you have a talk with your spouse because you need time to sort things out. Whatever decision you make about church attendance, commit yourself to discussing the issue again in a set time span. Also, if prayer is difficult now, I suggest you meditate or have quiet times during the day. I also suggest you stay connected to a trusted pastor or a spiritual director. We do not grow spiritually in isolation. We need a healthy balance between solitude and connection with others. And last, but most important, I suggest you become involved in an activity that allows you to express compassion to others, because this is the core of most major world religions and is the heart of Christianity.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

The growth paradox

Where are we in our world today and where is the world heading? In general, we are somewhere between "in the beginning," when God created the world, and the last day, also known as Judgment Day. My bet is that we are very close to the Day of Christ's return, judging by the books with "end" in them, such as *The End of History, The End of Oil, The End of Faith, The End of Nature, The End of Science* and *The End of Growth*. They all point to a growing awareness that our world today is running out of steam.

Take *The End of Growth*, for example. Our world has an obsession with growth, with an ever-bigger Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The aim of every government is to increase what the nation is producing, regardless of an increase of pollution, climate change and harm to creation. But politicians want to be (re-)elected, and the absence of growth hampers this and harms the rich, the Wall Street financial types who really run our world. No growth, or negative growth, means dissatisfied voters, closed factories and stagnation. So never mind the cost; growth must continue – by fair or foul means. It's like being hooked: just as addictive as nicotine or alcohol.

It's easy to grow from a low base. China, with a per capita income of $3000, only has to generate an extra $300 to reach ten percent growth, whereas the United States, with $33,000 income per person, has trouble growing at only three percent growth, which still adds $1,000. But grow we must or the economy will collapse.

Benchmarks

So we are boxed in. For the 2.7 billion people now living on less than two dollars a day, economic growth is essential to provide the most basic needs. We, the wealthy, need growth to pay off our debts and prevent civil unrest. To produce growth takes vast amounts of energy, and our best source (fossil fuel) comes with an ever-rising price tag.

Here is our dilemma: we can't live with growth and we can't live without it. This paradox is the biggest challenge in our world today. We are blind to this contradiction because, by and large, our quest for economic expansion is based on a kind of "religion" – not faith in God, but faith in progress, faith that science will redeem us.

The ultimate result is *The End of Capitalism,* and with it, the end of our comfortable lives.

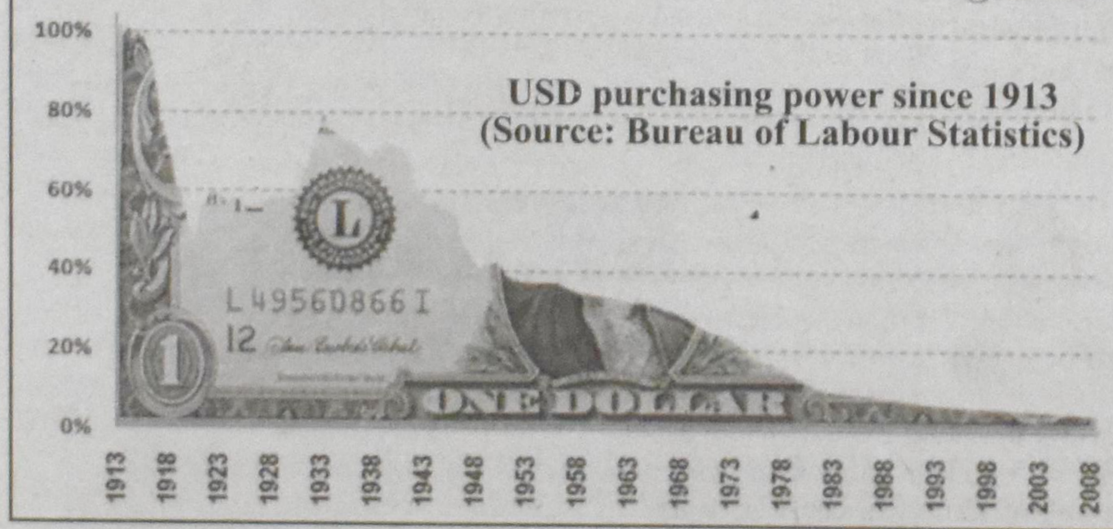
Does that mean inflation? Probably. The basic cost of doing business is increasingly burdened by extra security concerns, environmental hazards, pensions and health care costs, more elderly people and more costly commodities. All these expenses are shared, but there is a limit as to what we are able to pay as basic pay has not increased.

We are witnessing immense economic, political and socio-cultural upheavals, none of them easily controlled by the people in power. Egypt comes to mind, and the entire Middle East in general, where the young are rearing up and the world will never be the same.

The extraordinary expansion of the world economy in the postwar years – from 1945 to 1975 – was followed by a long period of economic stagnation, after which Western nations survived on playing with money, involving debt upon debt, both financial and environmental. According to Laurence Koftikoff, a Boston University professor, the U.S.A.'s financial debt alone amounts to $200 trillion, or $700,000 for every one of the 300 million Americans. If this is true, the debt will never be repaid, signalling *The End of Money*.

We live, as it were, between two trees – the ones depicted in Genesis 1 and in Revelation 22, suggesting that the Beginning and the End are closely linked. That's why it is still our task to pick up the ball Adam dropped: our focus must always be on being fully human (and the Middle East youth are doing that), on being Adam, on being "born of the earth." The word Adamah means that each one of us is tied with every gene of our existence to the life-bearing earth.

Bert Hielema was born in 1928 and lives in Tweed, Ont. His blog (hielema.ca) receives an average of 50 hits per day. He can be reached at hielema@allstream.net.



Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Called out for a reason

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in dialogue regarding the issue of same gender attraction and whether or not a theologically sound argument can be made against it. Everyone has the free will to choose their position. But regardless of beliefs, no one has the right to treat others badly or speak negatively towards them because of their belief system.

Why do I bring that up? For nearly six years, I have been journeying out of a gay identity. I have read numerous articles, blogs and comments that have been thrown around by what I could perceive as angry, bitter people. Primarily the articles are written by people who believe that being gay is a right, and that no one should speak negatively against being gay (LGBTQ), specifically Christians who hold a theological view that homosexuality is sin. I have, on occasion, made comments or shared my journey on such blogs and have been treated with verbal (written) abuse, which has often left me somewhat shell shocked and wondering why I am treated that way.

I am also reminded of the torment that I received as I grew up from bullies perceiving me as gay, who flung filthy, degrading words at me. You could say I have received torment from all sides. So why, if God loves me just the way I am, did he call me out of a gay identity? His voice was clear as day to me that spring morning when I went for a run. If he, the creator of the universe, designed me to be gay, why would he now say, "Time to change"?

Longing for restoration

Some would say it was because I was never gay to begin with. I was deluded and traumatized. Others would say I am still gay and just pretending, that I really didn't hear from God. Yet I cannot refute the experience that caused me to let go of an identity that I was very strongly holding on to. So why would God do something like this?

I believe it is part of a prophetic call that God has for the world. I don't necessarily mean that my life will change the world, but that this might be an example of the power of a redeeming God. He is a God who longs to restore ALL things. When we struggle with something and worry it might be too big for God, we start to believe that it will never be overcome. We might as well embrace the problem and just carry on. Many different issues fit in this category. For myself, I believed that my gay identity was too big for God, that he created me that way and that I would never change. Why would I want to? That life was all I knew.

We can also decide something is too little or insignificant to let go. It's not important enough to give to God. It's like that little white lie to make ourselves look good. How many times have you said "good," when someone asks how you are – when in reality, you are miserable.

Maybe the reason God called me out of a gay identity was to say that there isn't anything too big or too small for him. Could God's heart and longing be that we continually ask him, the one who loves us with an undeniable love, to search us (Psalm 139) and to know our hearts, to test us and know our thoughts, to see if there is anything in us that offends him and for us to allow him to lead us along a path of everlasting life?

I know that God called me out to redeem and restore my faulty thinking, my own deception of who I thought I was. He called me out to live a life pleasing to him, my creator, to give him glory, praise and honour, which is due only to him.

What is he longing to restore in your life?

Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

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40 YEARS OF SERVICE

Features

Rest for the weary: being renewed for life and ministry

Rachel Boehm

According to Statistics Canada, almost one third of working Canadian adults perceive themselves as workaholics. Yes, workaholics put in more hours, but that is not what defines them. Surprisingly, while workaholics devote more time to their work, research shows that they derive no more satisfaction or pleasure from it than do non-workaholics. "Perceived lack of time is a [big] stressor in their lives," explains the Statistics Canada report Canadian Social Trends. "It leaves [workaholics] feeling rushed, trapped in their daily routines and unable to finish everything they think needs to be done."

Rev. William Dellaman, who has worked in parish ministry for more than a decade now, has seen many pastors get caught in the trap of the workaholic mentality – rushing around, trying to do more but never catching up. "This is a job that costs a lot of energy," says Dellaman, pastor of Sonrise Christian Reformed Church in Ponoka, Alberta. "There is a lot of energy put out and – although there is some return – it does not come back in the same volume. So unless there is an intentional effort to take Sabbath rest or to seek renewal, ministry can become a grind."

The outcomes of pastors not finding time for rest and renewal are well documented and costly, both to pastors and the churches they serve. According to the website, PastorBurnout.com, one third of pastors felt burned out within their first five years of ministry, and 45% of pastors say they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry. More than half of pastors said that they believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's health and well being.

"Raw statistics would show that the outcome of pastors not taking time for renewal is burnout and departure from the ministry," says Rev. Randy Engle, Senior Pastor of North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Michigan. "Self-sufficiency can only take a pastor so far. Inevitably, their ministry becomes stale and they die on the vine."

Delleman agrees. "I have seen pastors leave the ministry because the burnout gets so deep that they just walk away," he says.

Delleman admits he courted burnout in recent years, but he took steps to address it before it overwhelmed his life and ministry. "To be honest, there was a time when I felt like I was in a bit of a desert, and I really struggled," he says. One of the steps Dellaman took to deal with feelings of disillusionment and discouragement was to join a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence peer learning group. "I needed a place where I could air my thoughts and discover that other church leaders were experiencing the same feelings I was," Delleman says.

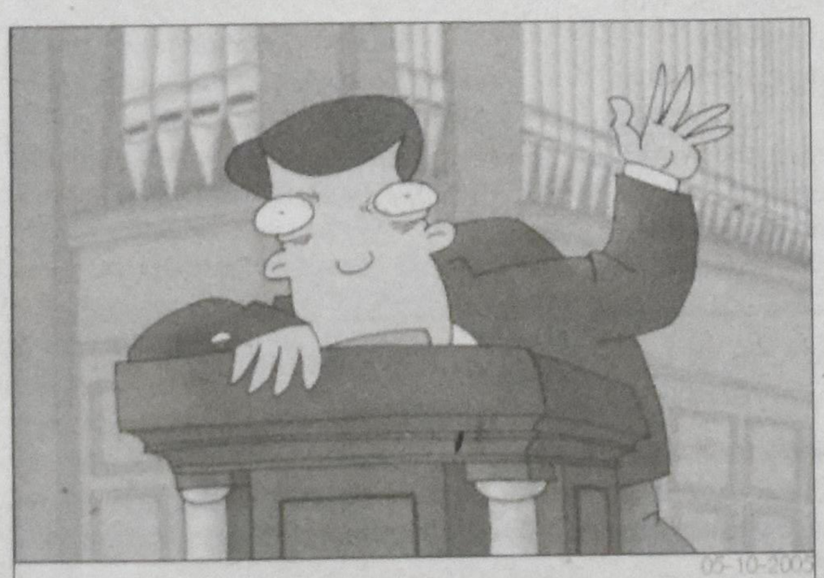
Rookie pastor Nick Monsma has been in ministry for just over a year, but – like Delleman – he, too, looks to his peer group for support and renewal. "We are studying the topic of intergenerational leadership," explains Monsma, pastor of East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church in Palmyra, New York. "We have a discussion about the book we are reading. The other part of our time together we just share what is going on in our lives and ministries and pray for each other." It's the mentoring that is particularly valuable to this young pastor. "I could get the intellectual benefits of the group elsewhere, but the ability to share experiences and hear the wisdom of the other pastors is the most beneficial. We can talk openly and get wisdom from each other and share our struggles."

Discovering that kind of mutual support and that you have colleagues who can truly understand what you are going through is crucial to thrive in ministry, these pastors say. "Being a pastor is a very lonely occupation a lot of the time," adds Delleman. "My involvement in a peer group eased that sense of aloneness significantly."

Engle, too, acknowledges that a peer group's deepest value may be found in spending time with "a table of colleagues who can truly say 'I've been there.' Your peer group colleagues become great friends, and like good friends, you look forward to spending time with them," Engle says.

Finally, if renewal is good for pastors, it's good for the church. "This is a draining job and I think most congregations want to support their pastor," Delleman says. "Peer group involvement doesn't cost much more than a few hours a month, and most churches would support this wholeheartedly. My congregation values my peer group involvement because they want me to stay healthy."

Delleman also points out that what's true for pastors is true for church members as well. "It doesn't matter if you're a dairy farmer or a preacher. Exhaustion simply doesn't produce our best work. It's time to reclaim God's gift of Sabbath so we all can be rested to fulfill our calling."



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Pastor Jerry, is this what they mean by "The Emerging Church"?

The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project invites pastors to grow by meeting regularly with their peers and reflecting on a variety of topics, from the "emerging church" to the eternal church, from contemplation to conflict, from counseling to community outreach.

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SUSTAINING Pastoral EXCELLENCE

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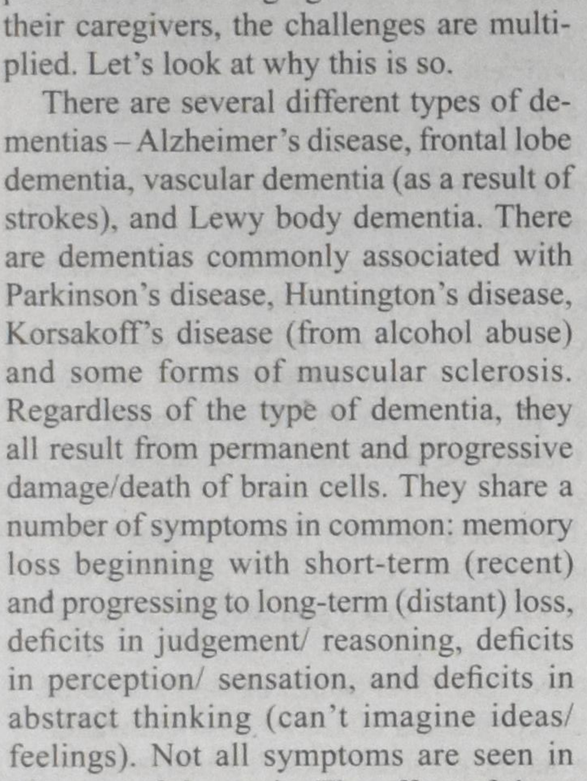
Aging... with dementia

Elly VanAlten

For most people aging is a challenging process. For those aging with dementia and their caregivers, the challenges are multiplied. Let's look at why this is so.

There are several different types of dementias – Alzheimer's disease, frontal lobe dementia, vascular dementia (as a result of strokes), and Lewy body dementia. There are dementias commonly associated with Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, Korsakoff's disease (from alcohol abuse) and some forms of muscular sclerosis. Regardless of the type of dementia, they all result from permanent and progressive damage/death of brain cells. They share a number of symptoms in common: memory loss beginning with short-term (recent) and progressing to long-term (distant) loss, deficits in judgement/ reasoning, deficits in perception/ sensation, and deficits in abstract thinking (can't imagine ideas/ feelings). Not all symptoms are seen in all types of dementia. The effect of these symptoms is that persons with dementia revert from being fully functioning adults through the different phases of dementia until they become like little babies. After working with residents with dementia for the past 23 years, I have become convinced that they are among the most vulnerable in our society.



Unfortunately, if we as family, friends and caregivers don't understand how dementia affects their ability to think and act, we can contribute to their negative quality of life. If we forget that they are doing the best that they can at any moment, we will have expectations of them that they cannot fulfill. If we make them feel that they are babies, when they are adults with irreversible brain damage, we undermine their feeling of self-worth. When we fail to recognize that their ability can vary depending on the time of day (they usually function better in the morning after a good night's sleep), their physical condition (infections and changes in medical conditions can impact negatively), the environment (too busy/noisy, too quiet/no stimulation), or caregiver approach (always relate to them as an adult person, not as a child or a task,) we make them feel lonely and possibly depressed.

How can we contribute to their quality of life? By practising respect, compassion, patience, understanding, gentleness, flexibility, and resourcefulness. Persons with dementia need the same things that we all need: they need to feel respected and appreciated; they need to feel connected, known and accepted; they need to love and feel they are loved; they need to sustain hope. We can help them by using a kind and gentle approach, talking in clear, simple language (speaking in the mother tongue can be very helpful), having a sense of humour, enabling the person to be as independent as possible, talking to them at a face-to-face level, and always maintaining self-esteem.

Activities that undermine their self-esteem and highlight their deficits include: asking them to recall recent events, scolding them for not remembering activities, events, persons or things, trying to do or get them to do something that is unfamiliar, and trying to bring them to present reality. We need to remember that they are unable to be in our reality, so it is important that we be with them in theirs.

The tragic reality of dementia is that it is progressive and irreversible. The strain of providing care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week will become too much without taking a severe toll, both mentally and physically, on caregivers. This is especially true when the person with dementia is at risk of eloping

Continued on p.20

snowflakes falling through the window

remember when?
grace
remember when
we went sledding
after school
in the gully?
1959
i think
the sun's rays defiantly blazing
but the glittery snow smirking
because it was so blasted cold

still
who cared
if the wind chafed our cheeks pink
or whisked away our panting breaths
foggy filaments
like exhaled souls
vanishing before our eyes

ecstatic
our boots broke
the virgin crust of scalloped snow
trailing holes behind

bundled in scarves and hats mom knit for us
we wiped our prickly ice-rimmed noses
with mittens tied together
slipped through sleeves of secondhand coats

remember the thrill!
whipping over slate shadows of skeletal trees
crisply etched on sparkling canvas by sun's glare
elegant limbs reaching
all the way
down the hill
as if aching to embrace the ice-skinned creek below
till our wild tracks waffled the slope
and creeping twilight blurred the edges

remember
grace
when dad brought us hot chocolate and marshmallows
in a stanley thermos?
lips frozen numb
i burned my tongue
frothy liquid dribbled
all the way
down my chin
we laughed and laughed
till dad said
ok
time to go
time to go home

"Are you enjoying the snowfall, Beatrice?
Getting dark out, isn't it?
I'm so glad you have this room with such a nice big window!"

"chocolatedadshadowtreescrispwaffles timetogo."

"Sorry, hon. I don't know what you're talking about,
but we're not going anywhere tonight.
Here's a cup of tea for you, love,
and a wafer cookie, the kind you like."

"marshmallowmittens cold!"

"You cold, Bea?
It's a blasted cold night, alright.
Here, just let old Gracie pull this shawl over your shoulders.
Reminds me of Mom.
She sure loved to knit, didn't she…
Here. Here's your slippers, too, dear.

Remember, Bea,
how we used to love to go sledding
no matter how cold it was?
We sure had some good times, didn't we?
Maybe you don't remember. That's OK.
Don't worry about it.
You can have my secondhand memories, Bea.
I'll remember for the both of us."

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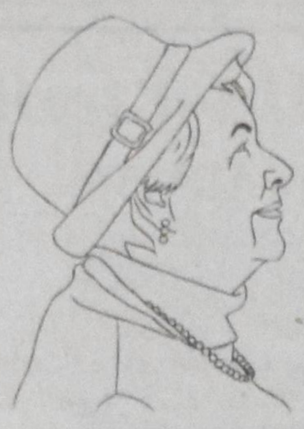

Mildred Budge: codicils and vows

Daphne Simpkins

When the minister asked whether the congregation would agree to help raise the newly baptized child, he looked about expectantly to see the raised right hands of the congregation as a whole signaling a vow before God that they were willing.

Mildred Budge kept her hands tightly clasped in her lap, as usual, for she did not make vows lightly. Because she did not know the couple or the child she did not see how she could authentically vow to help raise a child she didn't know. Mildred Budge did not make vows to God just to be polite.

But in following the gaze of the minister, Mildred saw her best friend Fran quickly signal with a raised hand that she, too, would participate in this vow of shared parenthood within the church.

Fran's response was so contrary to their on-going discussions about when to make a vow to God or not, that Mildred could barely concentrate during the prayer time that followed the baptism.

After service, in the car on the way to a preacher-forbidden lunch at the Country Club, Mildred asked Fran, "Did I see your hand move in a vow to God that you would help raise the baby?"

"Sort of," Fran replied easily, finding a parking spot. "It was really more of a wave – kind of like saying, 'I'm here if you need me.' Like that," she affirmed comfortably.

Pulling at the backs of their skirts, the two long-time friends click-clacked their way across the asphalt parking lot toward the deluxe lunch buffet as Fran explained, "Sometimes I get tired of not raising my hand."

"I just don't see how we can be expected to make a vow we can't envision keeping." Mildred replied, repeating herself.

Mildred had said the words before. Fran had heard the argument before. There were, indeed, times when Mildred and Fran had conversations so familiar that they didn't even need to say them out loud again. They had both made individual vows to God that they had been keeping. Fran was careful to explain in the report of her vows to her best friend that there was a codicil.

"I promised God that I would give up strawberries except when Dinzel's had them dipped in chocolate during the spring." Fran had made the vow after a severe hiatal hernia attack that she blamed on the seeds in the strawberries she had just eaten. It was a reasonable codicil to a vow that if God would rescue her from her present distress, she would not put the vessel of the Lord in jeopardy again except during an extraordinary season, such as the chocolate-covered strawberry season.

Mildred's most regretted vow – and there were no codicils – had involved a misadventure twenty years ago with a contact lens that got stuck underneath a recalcitrant eye lid. Since then, she had worn only glasses. She had kept her vow that if God would remove that contact lens from deep underneath her eyelid, she wouldn't wear them again; but since that time, someone had invented tinted contact lenses. Occasionally Mildred wondered what it would be like to have blue eyes instead of brown. Her vow kept her from finding out.

Neither woman told either of those stories of vows to God, but they hummed inside each woman as their conversation continued.

"Our objection to vowing to help parents raise their children is based on not teaching Sunday school anymore. It is simply a vow we cannot reasonably keep," Mildred reminded Fran.

"We could pray. That counts," Fran suggested thoughtfully. Then, Fran cut her eyes at Mildred as each woman had a prayer list so long already that adding another item to it seemed an unlikely occupation that either of them would be prepared to maintain. And, each woman had already wrestled with the concept of good works appointed for her. Each woman knew that there was a distinct difference between being agreeable to doing the works expected by God and not the busy work assigned by administrators within the church whose job review depended to some extent on their ability to recruit and manage volunteer labor. (Oh, yes, the choir director's job was a challenging one!)

A church lady's work was simpler in its way. Guided and guarded by a division of labor based on gender, a church lady had many safety nets of saying no and yes to what was asked of her. Fran and Mildred had decided that not vowing to raise other people's children was right, based on the truth that teaching Sunday school was a stage in their lives they had left behind after they became old enough to earn senior discounts at the local bank.

Walking down the lunch table buffet as they fixed their plates, Fran popped a piece of fried okra and nodded approvingly to Mildred who spooned some onto her plate next to the glorious turkey and dressing that was also there and which she had not expected to find out of season as it was.

They sat down at their reserved table, bowing their heads for a blessing that was so deep, so internal, so eternal, that both women raised their heads at the same time, saying "Amen" simultaneously as they picked up their respective forks.

"So, what made you raise your hand today?" Mildred pressed.

Fran tasted the cornbread dressing, closing her eyes briefly in approval, savoring the sage and then meditatively, replied, "Don't you ever get tired of saying no to what you have decided isn't your good work to do?"

Mildred nodded her head readily, tasting the turkey. "Yes. There are times when I would like to say yes to everything they ask of me from mission trips to playing the organ for choir rehearsal."

"You don't know how to play the organ," Fran said.

"True. But if I did, I'd say yes, except for funerals. I don't want to play the organ at funerals. That is actually why I've never learned to play the organ," Mildred explained, tipping some cranberry sauce near her dressing to complete the perfection of the next bite.

"So here we are – veteran church ladies – who have learned how to say no with aplomb guiltlessly, and we now want to say yes to everything," Fran summed.

"They don't teach you about that in Sunday school," Mildred replied.

Fran shook her head solemnly. "No, they don't prepare you in Sunday School for all of the ways you want to say yes to showing how much you love other people and God."

Mildred nodded, as a silver saucer of warm buttered crackers was placed near her elbow by a skilled waiter. "See? This is what the preacher doesn't understand. It is very difficult to fast when the Bridegroom is present."

"He would be present in our homes if one of us still cooked," Fran replied tartly, for although each woman had come to terms with eating Sunday lunch out which caused other people to work on a day appointed for rest, each woman continued to wrestle with the question – and so many others that was part of working out one's salvation with fear and hope.

"Living with Jesus is so absolutely good," Fran said suddenly, taking a warm saltine. This was, in fact, the second blessing over the meal.

Mildred took one too, nibbling the crisp buttered corner before popping it in her mouth. Delicious. Their conversation that followed was more of the same – words spoken to each other but intended to be overheard as praise and unceasing prayer by the Bridegroom, the hearer of vows and their codicils: the Maker of each day's feast.

Daphne Simpkins is the author of a Christian memoir about caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease: The Long Good Night. *It has recently been released as a Kindle product on Amazon. She may be contacted at DaphneSimpkins@Prodigy.net*

Aging and dementia ...continued from p. 19

or going to areas of the home that would put them at risk (e.g. the basement if they have trouble using stairs). This is the point at which caregivers may lose their patience, gentleness, kindness and sense of humour, and the person with dementia suffers as well. This is also the point at which consideration needs to be given to placement in a longterm care facility. This is not admitting defeat – this is allowing staff who are specially trained in dementia care and who only ever work 8-12 hours at a time take over. As family you will be important members of the team, and your input will always be welcome. The staff will be dependent on you to help them get to know your family member better, so they can tailor care to meet all his or her needs. You will have done the right thing for your family member.

As a church family we also have a role to play. Visits are important, especially if they can allow the caregiver to take a break. Of course, it is essential that we hold persons with dementia and their caregivers up with our prayers.

Elly VanAlten is a retired RN with over 30 years of nursing experience. The majority of her career was spent at a longterm care facility specializing in dementia. She's the Regional Advocate for Disability Concerns for Classis Alberta North. Elly (ellyv@telus.net) lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

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Classifieds

Obituaries

JOHN BERGSMA

February 4, 1910 - January 21, 2011
Romans 8:38, 39

John peacefully went to be with his Lord on Friday, Jan 21 in Abbotsford, B.C He led a full satisfied life, and was thankful to the end.
He was predeceased by his wife Tryntje and his son Jim, and his sons-in-law Bill and Art.
He was loved and remembered by his
daughter Jenny of Abbotsford, B.C. and
son Bernie (Margaret) of Georgetown, Ont.
daughter Esther of Abbotsford, B.C.
daughter Margaret (Fred) of Lethbridge, Alberta
17 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren

A celebration was held on January 27th, 2011 at New Life CRC, Abbotsford B.C.

Correspondence: Bernie Bergsma, 13409 Hwy 7 RR 1 Georgetown ON L7G 4S4

TIENA WILHELMINA LUBBERTS (nee **Wolting**)

Let it be joyfully known that Tiena glorified her Father in Heaven while here on earth, finished her labours for a Kingdom of love and entered Eternal Life on Tuesday, February 8, 2011 in her 92nd year from her earthly home at Grace Manor, Holland Christian Homes, Brampton, Ont.

We came together in Christ's peace on Friday, February 11, 2011, at the Rehoboth United Reformed Church, Ancaster, to mourn because we are human, to rejoice because we are Christians, to thank the Father for the gift of her life, to celebrate the power of Jesus' resurrection and to sing our Hallelujah's of hope. A private family internment was held before the memorial service.

Tiena was predeceased by her adoring husband Bert (2007), her son Arthur (1970), her grandchildren – Sherisse Veldstra (1982), and Brandon Veldstra(1993).

Mom is survived by her grateful children: Jane & Mark Heerema (Ingersol), Janie & Hank Visser (Georgetown), John & Dianne (Beamsville), Tim (Ancaster), Mary & Hilbert Bokma (Fenwick), Ruth & Ralph Veldstra (Hagersville), Rose & Fred Hoogendoorn (Stoney Creek).

Our dear Oma leaves behind a rich legacy of faith and unwavering trust in God to her 26 grandchildren & spouses, 32 great-grandchildren and 2 yet to be born this year. Mom also leaves behind a brother and sister-in-law in The Netherlands.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of Righteousness." 2 Timothy 4:7 & 8a

Contact information: Ruth Veldstra, 3663 Hwy 6, Hagersville ON N0A 1H0 rrveldstra@hotmail.com

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For a detailed job description and our Statement of Faith, please email:
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Our website: halifaxchristianacademy.ca

More job ads on p. 22

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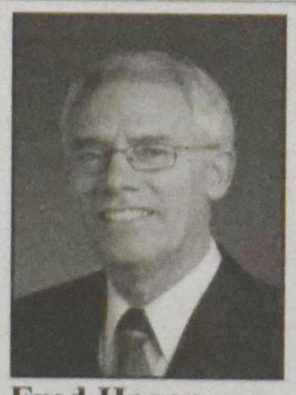

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Job Opportunities

Hudak to address CCBF conference

ANCASTER – Ontario Progressive Conservative Party Leader Tim Hudak will be the keynote speaker at the Niagara Region Conference of the Canadian Christian Business Federation (CCBF) on April 2. CCBF executive director Keith Knight says that, "If current polls hold true, Mr. Hudak could become the next premier of Ontario. It is therefore important that he become exposed to the Christian business community and that they become exposed to him and his platform."

The one-day conference, beginning at 9 a.m., will be held at Redeemer University College and will also feature three workshops. John Kuypers, noted author on corporate leadership, will speak about a new approach to decision-making. John Vandeweerd of Benefits Interface will talk about the benefits of using benefits to attract, motivate and retain staff. Finally, Redeemer's business faculty, staff and business students will lead a workshop on the benefits of their internship program.

Knight says the CCBF is committed to leadership development, especially among university students. CCBF's INturn program will be unveiled at the conference, designed to connect Christian university business students with career placements within the Christian workplace. Initiatives are already under way to spread the INturn program across the country to other Christian universities.

Cost for the conference is $35 and includes a buffet lunch. Seating is limited to 200. Registration is available online at ccbf.org. The April 2 conference is the first in a series of regional conferences to be held over the next few years as membership grows across the province and country.

Keith Knight
Executive Director

Toronto District Christian High School,
an independent school serving 400+ students in Grades 9 to 12 in the Greater Toronto Area of Ontario, Canada, seeks an innovative, seasoned

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Candidates will hold a master's degree in Educational Administration (or equivalent) and have experience in both teaching and administration at the secondary school level. Salary will be commensurate with experience. Please visit **www.tdchristian.ca/search** for more detailed information relating to this position.

Review of applications begins immediately and will continue until the deadline of December 15, 2011.

Send cover letter, résumé, statement of faith, and an explanation of your philosophy of education and vision for leadership by email to:
search@tdchristian.ca or by mail to:
Principal Search Committee,
Toronto District Christian High School
377 Woodbridge Ave., Woodbridge ON L4L 2V7

CLAC

Career Opportunity:
Labour Representative

Christian Labour Association of Canada

The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) is accepting applications for a labour representative position working out of its Fort St. John office in order to service a growing provincial membership in North Eastern B.C.

Representatives act as advocates for employees in workplaces unionized by CLAC. This requires them to possess strong analytical, writing, and relational skills, along with a desire for interest-based negotiation and conflict resolution. These skills are also paired with a solid grasp of Christian social justice principles and a demonstrated history of their application.

Some evening work and travel within the province can be expected. CLAC offers a competitive compensation package including a comprehensive benefit plan and pension plan. Previous education or experience in Labour Relations or Human Resources and/or knowledge of the construction industry would be considered assets.

More information on CLAC can be found at www.clac.ca.

For further information, contact David Prentice, Provincial Director, at 1-800-331-2522 or dprentice@clac.ca.

19955 - 81A Ave, Unit 100, Langley, BC V2Y 0C7
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Please address inquiries to John VanPelt, Principal at office@woodland.on.ca.
Information about Woodland Christian High School is available on our website at www.woodland.on.ca

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb 27 - Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching.

Mar 5 Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Abuse Prevention and Response Training. See ad below.

Mar 11-12 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock,** Ont. March 11, 8 pm. March 12 at 2:30 and 8 pm. For more information, call 519 283 6285 or 519 424 2985 or see ad Feb 14 issue.

Mar 19 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* Market Centre Theatre, Memorial Community Hall, **Blyth**, Ont. at 8 pm. For more information, call 519 283 6285 or 519 424 2985 or see ad Feb 14 issue.

Mar 25 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* Dutch Canadian Hall, **London**, Ont at 8 pm. For more information, call 519 283 6285 or 519 424 2985. See ad Feb 14 issue.

Mar **25** Benefit Concert: *Change of Scene*, a vocal band, will be performing the music of the Gaither Gospel Group at Rehoboth CRC, Bowmanville, ON, Friday night, 7:30, $15.00. All proceeds to benefit NILDCanada. For more information, please contact dvandemeent@knoxchristian.com or www.nildcanada.org

Apr 2 Niagara region CCBF conference at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont. Progressive Conservative Party Leader Tim Hudak will be the keynote speaker. Registration is available online at ccbf.org See article p. 22.

Apr 9 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre group presents *Vell kabaal op 'Clingendael'* Great Lakes Christian College, **Beamsville**, Ont. at 2 pm. For more information, call 519 283 6285 or 519 424 2985 or see ad Feb 14 issue.

Apr 8-10 Marriage Encounter weekend. **London, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org

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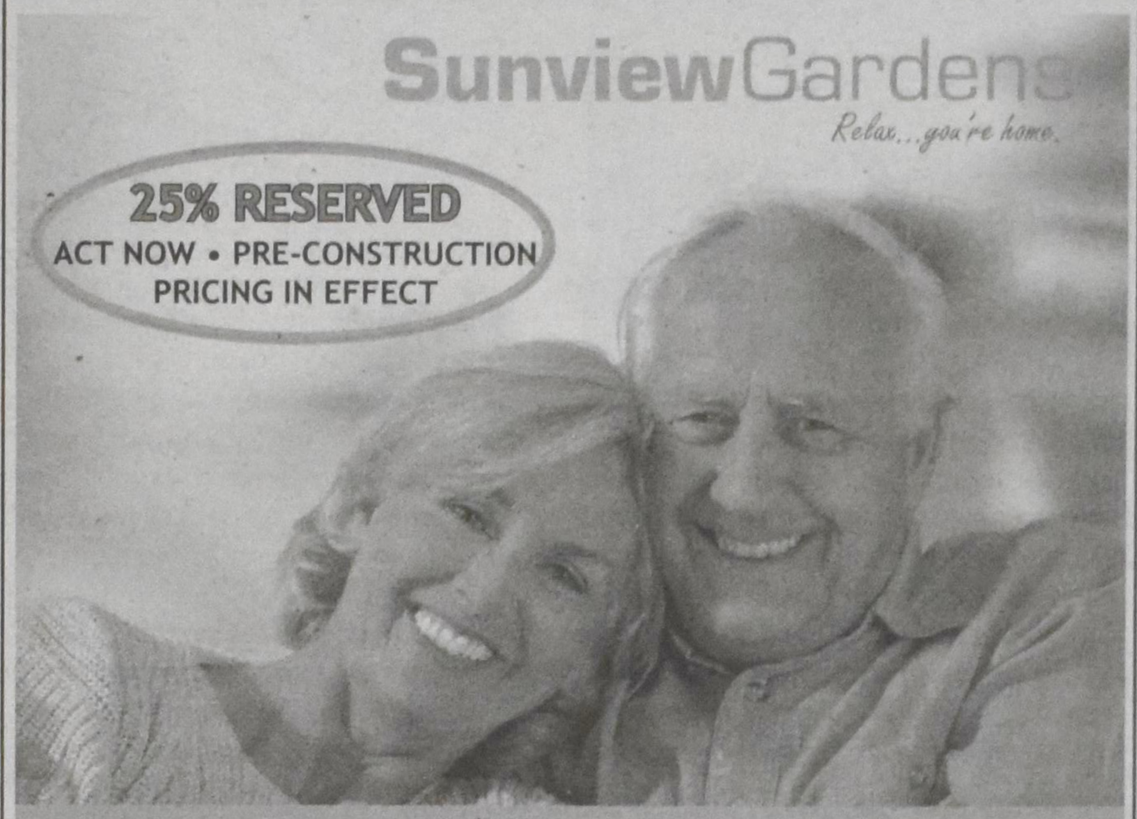

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Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Abuse Prevention and Response Training

This workshop will be of interest to Youth Leaders, Elders, Deacons, Abuse Response Team members, and all those who have leadership positions in the Christian Community, and who desire to learn more about abuse dynamics.

Date: Saturday March 05, 2011, 8:30am to 3:30pm
Location: Waterloo CRC, 209 Bearinger Road, Waterloo, ON N2L 4H5
Phone: 519-746-5727 Web: **scc.wmott.ca/workshops.htm**

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News

Breathing new life into Genevan psalms

Henry de Jong

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Christians from around the world came to the Calvin Symposium on Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan the last week of January. They sang together at numerous worship services, vespers and workshops, joyfully joined by their unity of faith. But for many, the songs of The Psalm Project from the Netherlands evoked an even deeper connection, like that of a reunion – a homecoming. Three musicians from this Dutch group joined forces with local musicians to introduce contemporary versions of a dozen Genevan psalms. The melodies and texts of these psalms, still clearly sounding in the fresh arrangements, brought tears to the eyes of many because of their association with a covenant of faith going back generations.

The Psalm Project is multi-cultural (like the Genevan psalms themselves) but the driving force behind it is a deeply rooted, Dutch tradition (unbroken for 450 years), of singing from the psalm book that John Calvin compiled in Geneva. This tradition, transplanted by Dutch immigrants to North America where it has since been largely lost, has been waning steadily in Holland as well.

Eelco Vos, composer and pianist for *The Psalm Project*, stands in this tradition. He showed the Symposium the small, well-worn 'Psalmen' book that he got from his grandfather on his fifth birthday, and from which he had to regularly memorize verses. As a child and teenager, these psalms seemed to him remote from the modern world, while still echoing the strong faith of the many generations that have sung them. Eelco wanted to preserve this treasure when he first set out to make contemporary arrangements of some Genevan psalms. In one of the Symposium workshops he explained how musical language has developed since Calvin's day, and how arrangements can be made to make old songs accessible to a modern audience. These include such things as simplifying the tonality, adding development to the song with choruses and bridges, and keeping the text modern and straightforward. The results are richly rewarding. For the many who have grown to appreciate popular styles, guitars, percussion and other instruments in worship, *The Psalm Project* set-

The Psalm Project*'s Eelco Vos accompanies Miranda de Vlieger.*

tings seem natural, even while the ageless beauty of the texts and melodies make them sublime. During the 10-day family reunion of *The Psalm Project* with folks in Grand Rapids, Michigan, this was experienced over and over again.

The Psalm Project left behind a memento – the newly minted CD of 13 of their psalms sung in English. These are wonderful to listen to, as worthwhile as any WOW CD. But the psalms are meant for singing and the real hope is that they find their way into worship services, where they can inspire new shoots from our spiritual and cultural roots.

Henry de Jong of St. Catharines (psalms@newmaker.net) still treasures the Dutch 'Psalmen' book that his parents gave him in 1966.

The Psalm Project's websites (Dutch: **thepsalmproject.nl** and English: **the psalmproject.com**) offer both audio and video samples of their psalms, and free sheet music for all 13 of the CDs' psalms. The English site also gives information about where to buy the CDs in the U.S. and Canada.

Seventy singers advise hymnal committee

Curt Gesch

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – A forthcoming hymnal meant to serve the Reformed Church of America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) received input from 70 North American advisors at a gathering in Grand Rapids, Michigan, January 27-28.

The new hymnal, slated for release in 2013, has a wider mandate than a single-denominational hymnal: while staying within the general parameters of a Reformed ecclesiology and theology, it will attempt to meet the needs of congregations from two historically distinct denominations. Ranging from traditional rural congregations to media-savvy urban mega-churches; from Afro-American to Korean, Hispanic to Filipino; from high-church liturgical to folk-oriented; from new church plants to an 1814 congregation in Rensellaer, "New Amsterdam": all have habits, needs, desires and opportunities to grow and develop.

Conference leader and Reformed Worship editor, Rev. Joyce Borger, instructed participants to make their recommendations with both denominations in mind. This is not to be "your hymnal" nor "your congregation's" hymnal, but a hymnal that belongs to the whole church, Borger repeatedly remarked.

With Borger's apt Biblical encouragement (Php. 2:4), advisors dedicated themselves to a day and a half of singing, listening and discussing hymns and songs. The procedure involved a big binder with a list of "yes" songs – songs that will probably be in the new hymnal – and others marked with bold print. The latter were introduced by members of the hymnal committee with historical comments or requests for specific advice, and then sung by the whole group. Time constraints meant that not all of the "bolded" songs could be sung, leaving some of the advisors wondering how final decisions would be made on these songs.

Accompanying the seventy-voice choir were trained piano players and organists. For a few songs, a guitar accompaniment was provided, but the committee did not attempt to replicate a technically-advanced praise band; rather, the emphasis was on singing songs in a way possible for virtually any congregation to attempt.

The new hymnal, *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, will contain selections that refer to all 150 psalms, indexed for convenience. For those wishing a complete psalter, Faith Alive will be producing *For All Seasons: The Complete Book of Psalms for Worship* in 2012.

Questions about whether or not to include church confessions (the ecumenical creeds will definitely be included) in the hymnal, questions about music format – whether accompaniment should be supplied in the hymnal or in a supplement – and the design of the cover are still being discussed at the central hymnal committee level.

Seventy tired, enthusiastic and hoarse-throated singers stumbled into cars and onto hotel vans with a sense of the excitement a large-scale communal project brings. In this case, *Lift Up Your Hearts* may also be a project that works to heal a 150-year-old rift in the North American Reformed communion of churches.

Curt Gesch lives in Telkwa, B.C.

Elim Investment Opportunities

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